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Rumbold
The winged life

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THE
WINGED
LIFE

*'He who bends to himself a joy
Doth the wingèd life destroy:
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sunrise.'*

BLAKE



John Phillips. Courtesy LIFE Mag.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry on active service

THE WINGED LIFE

A PORTRAIT OF
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
POET AND AIRMAN

BY
RICHARD RUMBOLD AND
LADY MARGARET STEWART

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Dedicated to M.C. - from us both

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INTRODUCTION

SKETCH FOR THE PORTRAIT

by Richard Rumbold

In writing this book my collaborator and I had two aims in view. Firstly, to shed some light on the life and ideas of a complex, gifted and fascinating individual; a man whose life was packed with adventure, both in the realms of action and in the realms of thought; who was pioneer airman, writer, poet, philosopher, administrator, mathematician, scientist and practical inventor. Secondly, and in so doing, to say something about that relatively new discovery—flying; about the psychology of the airman; and about the beauty and interest of his profession.

As it happens, these aims are largely identical. For Saint-Exupéry not only spent a large part of his own life in the air, but was the author of incomparably the best books that have been written on the subject. Men of action seldom write well, men given to reflection seldom lead adventurous lives: Saint-Exupéry combined the best of both worlds. His three main works—*Night Flight*, *Wind, Sand and Stars* and *Flight to Arras*—carry the authenticity and conviction, which spring from professional knowledge and experience, while at the same time that experience is conveyed with the insight, the sensibility, and the power and grace of language of the born writer.

Maybe it is unfair to compare the great literature of the sea, which possesses its Smolletts and its Conrads, with the literature of flying, for men have sailed the sea for thousands of years whereas the air is still a new and comparatively unexplored element; even so, flying has inspired surprisingly little good

writing. David Garnett's *Rabbit In The Air* (a book through whose pages the wind blows); Llewellyn Rhys' *England Is My Village*; Cecil Lewis' *Sagittarius Rising*; Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *Listen, The Wind . . .*; Jules Roy's *The Happy Valley*—the list, alas, is a short one. At the head of it stands Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: the only man who has written about the air with genius.

The air, too, played a large part in determining his outlook on life. Saint-Exupéry was a humanist; he believed—unfashionable as it sounds today—in the self-sufficiency of human virtue, recognised the possibilities open to man as a spiritual and creative being, and extolled the values of friendship, love, responsibility ('For whom the bell tolls . . .'), compassion and beauty. 'My civilisation,' he wrote, 'is founded upon the reverence for Man present in all men. . . . What makes it great is that a hundred miners are called upon to risk their lives for a single miner entombed. . . . And what they rescue in rescuing that man is Man.'

This religion of humanity, the corner-stone of his philosophy, he acquired as a young man when he joined a small band of pioneer airmen opening up, in the teeth of incredible dangers, the first air routes linking France with her North African colonies and thence with the principal towns and cities of South America.

Thus, as he relates in *Wind, Sand and Stars*, about ten or twelve airmen, among them Saint-Exupéry himself, once found themselves stranded for the night in a lonely remote spot in the Sahara. (The crews always flew this part of the route in convoy owing to the danger, in case of forced landings, from hostile Moorish tribesmen.) As it turned out, it was almost the exact spot where two fellow-pilots, Gourp and Erable, had been murdered the year before; and Saint-Exupéry and his companions knew that there was a raiding party of three hundred Moors lurking somewhere in the vicinity. They prepared

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themselves as far as possible against attack, barricading themselves round with wooden packing-cases, and placing inside each case, as in a sentry-box, a lighted candle, shielding it from the wind. 'And so,' continues Saint-Exupéry, 'on this naked rind of the planet, in an isolation like that of the beginnings of the world, we built a village of men. Sitting in the flickering light of the candles on this kerchief of sand, on this village square, we waited in the night. We were waiting for the rescuing dawn—or for the Moors. Something, I know not what, lent this night a savour of Christmas. We told stories, we joked, we sang songs. In the air there was that slight fever that reigns over a gaily prepared feast. And yet we were infinitely poor. Wind, sand and stars. The austerity of Trappists. But on this badly-lighted cloth, a handful of men who possessed nothing in the world but their memories, were sharing invisible riches. . . . We had met at last. Men travel side by side for years, each locked up in his own silence or exchanging those words which carry no freight—till danger comes. Then they stand shoulder to shoulder. They discover that they belong to the same family. They are like the prisoner set free who marvels at the immensity of the sea.'

During the rest of his life Saint-Exupéry was to experience again and again these moments of fusion; moments in which there sprang up a joy which he believed to be 'the most precious possession of our civilisation'; moments in which, the barriers of separation between man and man broken down, he suddenly became conscious of the spark and flame of our common humanity; moments in which he felt himself united to others, as others were united to him, by invisible ties in the depths of the heart; moments in which, as though merged in some deeper wider whole, he seemed to sense the great refreshing winds of a universal life blowing about him. And these moments were one of the springs of the humanistic outlook which irradiates his work.

With his many, varied and apparently contradictory gifts Saint-Exupéry appears at first to be a rather puzzling character. Even to his own countrymen he was something of an enigma. 'Quel garçon extraordinaire,' they always say of him; 'il n'était pas tout à fait de ce monde!'—implying that he was odd, eccentric, a bit of a fantast, a man with only one foot in the real world. But in this, too, his love of the air also gives us a clue.

What first of all does flying signify for the soul of man? Surely, in the first place: ascent, endeavour, aspiration (as symbolised, for instance, in the beautiful classical legend of Dædalus and his son, Icarus). 'There,' as the poet, Michael Roberts, wrote:

'There, in the equipoise of motion, bird and pilot
Holding the substance and the shadow distant, rise
In the impossible element, expend their spirit,
Passioned by their own speed, till the spirit fails . . .'

Secondly: escape, release, freedom, the longing for pure, untrammelled, unobstructed movement, the longing to shake off the fetters of this earth. 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away and be at rest . . .', as the Hebrew psalmist laments.

Now these two impulses—aspiration and escape—were the two main springs of Saint-Exupéry's life and art. In other words, he was an idealist and a mystic; an intensely religious man who, living in our irreligious age, our age of 'Angst' and despair, embraced not the discipline of the monastery, but that of a hard, exacting and perilous profession; who sought detachment, renunciation and self-immolation, not in the austerities of the Trappist, but in physical insecurity, hardship and danger; who meditated not on God in the loneliness of the cell, but on a mystique of humanity in the solitudes and perspectives of the starry heavens.

And, as we shall see, the central drama of his life and character

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lay in the conflict between these mystical and idealistic impulses and the claims of the every-day practical world—the world of makeshift, compromise and opportunism. As a result, the pendulum of his mind was always swinging uneasily between the poles of optimism and pessimism, euphoria and despondency, hope and despair, like the graph of a manic-depressive.

Towards the end of his life, faced by the growth, on the one hand of a soulless Western materialism, on the other of equally soulless totalitarian ideologies, his philosophical humanism seemed at times a ludicrous anomaly; for he believed that the human spirit (and that for him meant particularly the spirit of European tradition and culture) was being slowly strangled to death by these two anti-human forces—‘l’homme robot, l’homme termite,’ as he termed them. Consequently, the moods of hope and elation diminished and the moods of gloom and despondency increased.

And after his death in 1944 a letter was found amongst his papers in which he declared that he did not mind whether or not he was killed in the War. ‘I am sad,’ he wrote, ‘for my generation, empty as it is of all human content (de toute substance humaine). One cannot live any longer on refrigerators, on politics, on balance-sheets and cross-word puzzles. One cannot live any longer without poetry, colour and love.’ And he concluded: ‘My impression is that we are approaching the blackest period in the whole of human history.’ This letter led to the theory that he had committed suicide, either deliberately or as the victim of an unconscious death-wish; an unlikely theory, on the whole, yet impossible to refute, for he disappeared mysteriously on reconnaissance operations over the Mediterranean, leaving behind no traces of himself or his aircraft.

A final word as to how this book came to be written in collaboration.

During the war, as a pilot in the R.A.F., I quickly succumbed, like so many other airmen, to the spell and novelty of flying:

the speed, the lightness, the ballet-like grace of movement; the strange fantastic geometry of loops, spins, rolls and rectangular circuits round the aerodrome; the sense of exhilaration one experienced in the great heights and solitudes of the sky; the difficult, but exciting, adjustment of one's mind to a new 'feel' of time and space; the sudden, revivifying contact with Nature—with cloud and wind and star; the first cross-country flights in which one inevitably got lost because one had not yet trained one's eye to look for landmarks in the jigsaw puzzle of the earth; the freedom, the peace of mind, one found away from the hard, resisting earth in that light, blowy, oxygenous, sky-blue element; the light-hearted relations of airmen with one another and the discovery of oneself and them which grew up in this welter of new experiences and adventures; and last, but not least, the sense of comradeship which we felt in those mysterious uncanny silences before a raid or which was transmitted by the warm, human, friendly smile of the fitter as he drew away the chocks from under the wheels of the aircraft. Yes, it had seemed a new life, perhaps an infinitely expanding blossoming life; and in finding it I had felt as happily mystified and elated as those fifteenth and sixteenth century explorers must have felt when, for the first time, they landed on remote and virgin shores.

After the war I wanted to try to express what the discovery of the air had meant to me; and I began casting about for some form in which to throw together my impressions and memories. But later, abandoning this scheme, I decided instead to try my hand at a Life of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

Not long afterwards I met Margaret Stewart, who having been the wife of a pioneer airman, as well as the daughter of a former Air Minister, Lord Londonderry, shared my enthusiasm for the air; it was not long before she also began to share my interest in the projected biography. So we decided to collaborate on it together.

At that time she owned a small private aircraft, a Miles

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Whitney Straight, and together we flew all over France collecting our material, mainly from interviews with Saint-Exupéry's relations, friends and fellow-airmen. It will be only too evident how much we owe to the help all these people so generously gave us.

In particular we desire to thank Saint-Exupéry's mother, the Comtesse de Saint-Exupéry; his wife, Consuelo de Saint-Exupéry; Mlle. Louise de Vilmorin; Princess Marthe Bibesco; Mme. Henri Guillaumet; Mme. Pierre Jean-Jouve; Mme. Henri Monnet; M. Didier Daurat; M. Jean Leleu; General Corniglion-Molinier; General Gelée; M. Léon Werth; M. Néri; and Mr. Paul Willert.

No study of Saint-Exupéry could be written without generous use of biographies, memoirs and articles, and we are particularly grateful to Pierre Chevrier and his publishers, Messrs. Gallimard, for permission to quote from his biography *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry* (quotations, all rights reserved, on pp. 26, 29, 51-2, 119, 121, 124, 125-6, 146, 147, 158); to Georges Péliissier, author of *Les Cinq Visages de Saint-Exupéry*, and his publisher, Flammarion and Co.; and to the Editor of *Figaro Littéraire*.

Messrs. Heinemann have most kindly allowed us to quote from translations of Saint-Exupéry's books published by them; and Mr. T. F. Burns, of Messrs. Hollis and Carter, has done likewise in the case of *The Wisdom Of The Sands*. Mr. and Mrs. Michael Hillary have kindly allowed us to quote from Richard Hillary's *The Last Enemy* and from letters contained in Mr. Lovat Dickson's biography of Richard Hillary; and we are also grateful to Sir Oliver Harvey for permission to quote extracts from his speech on Saint-Exupéry and Hillary made at a meeting of the Association of Combatant Writers in Paris.

Mr. John Phillips of *Time-Life* has given us the right to reproduce the photograph on the frontispiece.

We also acknowledge our debt to René Delange's *La Vie*

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de Saint-Exupéry, which includes Léon Werth's charming study of him, *Tel Que Je L'ai Connue*; to an issue of the French literary magazine, *Confluences*, devoted exclusively to appreciations of Saint-Exupéry by people who knew him at different periods; to Mr. F. A. Shuffrey's two essays on Saint-Exupéry; and to Mr. Lovat Dickson's *Life of Richard Hillary*.

I am also deeply grateful to my friend, Mr. Archibald Colquhoun, who gave me lavishly of his time and help in the latter stages of the work; and to my friend and companion, Mrs. Hilda Young, who typed a great deal of the manuscript.

R. R.

CHAPTER I

THE CRADLE OF DREAMS

Antoine-Marie-Roger de Saint-Exupéry was born at No. 1 Place Bellecour in Lyons on the 29th June, 1900, and he was one of five children—three sisters, Marie, Simone and Gabrielle, and a younger brother, François.

On both sides of his family he belonged to the ancient nobility of France. The family name of Saint-Exupéry is a very old one, dating back as far as the fourth century; his mother's family, Boyer de Fonscolombe, though not of such distinguished lineage, had been settled in Provence for many generations.

The Comtes de Saint-Exupéry derived their name from the small market-town of Saint-Exupéry, situated in the hilly country of the Limousin, in south-west France. In the Middle Ages they had been Chevaliers, or Knights, and it was one of their privileges to ride in the carriages of the King. An early member of the family had been that Bishop of Toulouse who was a friend of both Saint Jérôme, the fourth-century Saint, and of Pope Innocent the First.

According to Saint-Exupéry's friends, there was always much of the aristocrat about him; he radiated a kind of aristocratic effulgence of dignity and good manners, as though the blood of his ancestors still flowed strong in his veins. And, as one of them remarked, even about the ring of his name, with its combined suggestion of knight-errantry and saintliness, there was an aura of the heroic days of Christian chivalry. Certainly, this aristocratic tradition was reflected in his physical fearlessness, his courteous diffidence and his sense of responsibility towards others.

By the time of Antoine's birth the Saint-Exupéry family

had passed through the vicissitudes common to many such families throughout French history. The old home had long gone, and the Saint-Exupérys were poor. Antoine's father, Jean de Saint-Exupéry, worked as an insurance agent in the Rhône district. He died in 1904, four years after the birth of his elder son, and he left his widow little money to bring up five young children.

Their difficulties were partly resolved by the kindness of Madame de Saint-Exupéry's relations. The children spent half the year at the Château de la Môle, in the Var, the home of their maternal grandmother. All his life Antoine loved this sunlit region of France—'the only corner of the world, apart from Greece, where even the dust has a fragrance.' Simone, his favourite sister, later married the Comte d'Agay, and he was a frequent visitor to their home at Agay, a little village on the Mediterranean coast between Cannes and St. Raphaël.

In the summer Madame de Saint-Exupéry took the children to stay with their great-aunt, Madame de Tricaud, who lived at Saint-Maurice-de-Remens, a country house near Ambérieu, which is not far from Lyons. Madame de Tricaud was a formidable woman who intimidated her relations, her domestic staff and even the local villagers by her domineering character; at Saint-Maurice she insisted on household prayers morning and evening, and would begin intoning the first words of prayer when still seated at the dining-room table; then she would jump up, still intoning, and sweep majestically forward to the chapel, with a retinue of nephew, nieces, cousins and servants following meekly in her wake. Even the local priest was terrified of her. 'Father, I have lost my temper today,' Antoine once overheard her saying in her private Confessional. To which the frightened Abbé quickly replied: 'Madame, I am sure it was for a very good reason!'

As a child Antoine was rather a handful, according to his mother who now lives at Cabris, a quiet, delightfully unspoilt

little mountain-village which lies a thousand feet or more above Grasse in the South of France. She has a tiny, sparsely-furnished chalet, beautifully situated on a slope of the mountain, and from it for miles and miles around there is a panorama of olive and vine-clad hills shimmering in diaphanous sunlight; and it is flanked by pink oleander-trees in which all day long the cicadas chirp merrily.

At the age of six Antoine frightened her out of her wits by rigging up a wire between his bedroom window-sill and a drainpipe along which he tried to slide. Of course he fell off, but fortunately he was by then not far from the ground. He also invented a bicycle with sails which he had tried to launch in the air by riding it at full tilt off the end of a spring-board. It was the first of his many inventions.

Like most sensitive children, he also wrote poetry, and would often come to his mother's bedroom in the middle of the night, wake her up and insist on reading his poems aloud to her there and then. Impetuous and enthusiastic by nature,¹ he was lost to the practical world once an idea took hold of him.

In later life, according to his friend Léon Werth, he would ring up friends at all hours of the night to read them part of a manuscript, or to seek their advice about a mathematical problem; even simply to ask them to hum a tune which he had forgotten but suddenly wanted to recall. As Werth put it, 'He had no respect for the hierarchy of the hours'; and he guessed it was partly because, as an airman, accustomed to darting over the earth at hundreds of miles an hour, Saint-Exupéry had acquired a sense of release from the bonds of space and time.

There was something in him, too, which seemed to crave this release. 'One day in 1932,' says his friend Dr Georges Péliissier, who was then in Algiers, 'I felt I must introduce him to the joys of sailing. I took him out in an 8-metre sailing-boat.

¹ Mr. Stuart Gilbert, the translator of *Night Flight* and the posthumous *The Wisdom of the Sands*, writes: 'He was a man to whom one took an immediate and instinctive liking; quite devoid of conceit and almost boyish in his enthusiasm.'

The weather was fine. A fresh breeze, a slight swell. We slid along at a fast pace, the water rustling against the hull, making that sound which sailors refer to when they say the ship "talks." In that halcyon atmosphere, well-known to the sailing enthusiast, one feels a carefree gaiety which makes one want to burst into song. Antoine sang all kinds of ribald songs, interrupting himself every now and again to express his delight at discovering this new pastime. "Think of it! If only the boat were a little bigger and one could batten her down in all weathers, and stock her with provisions and a spare set of sails, one could roam the seven seas for ever. It would never be necessary to touch land at all, except at desire; one would become a wanderer, freed for ever from the ties of this earth." And Antoine resumed his song . . .¹

To his friends Saint-Exupéry always gave the impression of a man ill at ease in this world, as though he resented its confinement. 'He was like the hero of his own fairy story, *The Little Prince*,' as Princess Marthe Bibesco, who had met him in Rumania, expressed it. 'He seemed not to belong to this earth at all,' she went on, 'but to have dropped on it by chance from Mars or Jupiter or one of the other planets. But that,' she added, 'was the source of his strange and elusive charm; it had a kind of evanescent quality.'

Can this 'other-worldliness' be explained by some early influence? There are two conflicting views about the effects of his childhood upon him. The well-known French psychoanalyst, Madame Pierre Jean-Jouve, who had known him well during the 'thirties, told us he lived to an abnormal extent in a world of dreams and make-believe; even his love of flying, she considered, became in the end a kind of escapism, a desire to blot out the realities of life through what she called '*la fuite dans l'extase*.' It was difficult, she said, to account for this escapism unless in childhood he had had a psychic shock which,

¹ *Les Cinq Visages de Saint-Exupéry*.

in a person so sensitive, could easily have driven him to seek a refuge in fantasy.

On the other hand, the orthodox view, confirmed by his biographers, is that his childhood was emotionally secure—in fact, blissfully normal. In his books there are poignant references to the family and the home, and throughout his life these memories seem to have acted as a stabilising influence on him. ‘The marvel of a home,’ he once wrote, ‘is not that it shelters or warms a man, nor that he owns its walls. It comes from those layers of sweetness which it gradually stores up in us. May it form, deep in our hearts, that obscure range of mountains from which springs the sources of our dreams.’¹

Family and home were emblems and symbols of security; of a continuing tradition which transcended the hazards and transience of individual life; of enduring spiritual realities in a world of flux and uncertainty and change. Once after a forced landing in the Sahara he recalled ‘the stately cupboards of our house. They opened to display heaps of frozen stores, piles of linen as white as snow. And the old housekeeper trotted like a rat from one cupboard to the next, forever counting, folding, unfolding, re-counting the white linen; exclaiming, “Oh, good Heavens, how terrible!” at each sign of wear which threatened the eternity of the house; running instantly to burn out her eyes under a lamp so that the woof of these altar clothes should be repaired, these three-master’s sails be mended, in the service of something greater than herself—a god, a ship.’

Yet, in spite of these nostalgic moments, he was far too much of an individualist ever to accept as a way of life for himself the Catholic and Conservative order in which he had been brought up. He respected its values—its simple code of reverence for God, for the home and the family, and for the soil—envying the stability and contentment which could result from acceptance of those values. But his own life was a complete negation of them: he lost when young his early Christian faith and never

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

recovered it; he married an extravagantly unconventional woman by whom he never had any children; nor did he ever thrust down roots in any locality or settle anywhere for long at a time.

It may well have been, as Madame Jean-Jouve also suggested, that there was a constant inner conflict in him between his restless craving for adventure and the longing for the patterned ordered existence of his childhood; in any case, she thought, much of his later behaviour, particularly the strange tale of his marriage, could only be explained as a reaction against the rigid conventionality of his family upbringing.

In 1912 one of the early flying 'aces' of those days, an airman called Védrières, came to Ambérieu to give a flying display. Antoine hung about the field for several days, making friends with the mechanics and admiring the machines, and eventually persuaded Védrières to take him up for a 'flip.' The future pilot had been given his baptism of the air.

The flight inspired an ecstatic poem only three lines of which are extant today:

'Les ailes frémissait (*sic*) sous le souffle du soir
Le moteur, de son chant, berçait l'âme endormie,
Le soleil nous frôlait de sa couleur palie . . .'¹

It was dedicated to one of his masters at the College of Nôtre-Dame de Sainte-Croix, a Jesuit school at Le Mans, a town about a hundred miles south-west of Paris.

The Comtesse de Saint-Exupéry had come to settle at Le Mans at the end of 1909, and Antoine, then ten years old, was sent in the autumn of that year to the school as a day-pupil. The street in which the school is situated has since been proudly re-named 'Rue Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.'

On the outbreak of war in 1914 she decided to send her two

¹ The wings tremble under the evening breeze, -
The engine, with its song, rocks the sleeping heart,
The sun's pale warmth shines down upon us . . .

sons for safety to Switzerland, where they were educated at the College of St. Jean at Fribourg. This was a school run by the Marist Fathers, a well-known Catholic missionary order. In the meantime, the Comtesse, who had received training and diplomas as a hospital nurse, tended the war-wounded passing in hospital-trains through Ambérieu station.

In Switzerland François, her younger son, fell ill with cardiac rheumatism, was brought back to Ambérieu, and died. Antoine was present at his death-bed, and the boy, who was only fifteen years old, suddenly exclaimed to his elder brother: 'Antoine, go and fetch Mamma, because I am going to die soon.' And when his mother entered the room he said to her: 'My little Mother, you must not worry about me. I have already sensed certain things about life which are very ugly, and I don't think, if I had grown up, I should have been able to face them. I shall be better-off in the place where I am going to now.' Antoine, who was extremely fond of François, was deeply moved by his composure and resignation, and his death, which left him broken-hearted, may well have caused the psychic shock referred to by Madame Jean-Jouve.

At school Antoine was not an outstanding scholar. He worked by fits and starts, and then only at the subjects which happened to take his fancy, which were chiefly Latin and French composition. Curiously enough, he never showed at this age any sign of that gift for mathematics which later led experts to claim that, had he given all his time and energy to this subject, he would have made a distinguished contribution to it.

Both the priests and his school-fellows found him puzzling, for even at this age his moods changed quickly. At one moment he would be gay, open-hearted, full of generous enthusiasms; at the next his liveliness had suddenly changed to a brooding taciturnity. It was generally agreed that, though gentle, good-natured and lovable, his character showed traces of marked instability; and, in particular, it was difficult to account for those sudden fits of absentmindedness when, impervious to

the external world, he would lapse into long spells of day-dreaming. According to his history master at Fribourg, at whose table he sat for meals, he would come into the refectory with a preoccupied look, barge into chairs and furniture, and knock over the milk-jugs and coffee-pots on the table like ninepins. It was not only that his movements were clumsy, but also that he could not be bothered to control them.

He was already tall and broad-shouldered, and soon he was to develop the physique of a heavy-weight boxer. 'Monolithic, massive and gauche' his friend General Chassin was to call him; and he goes on to describe 'his Mickey-Mouse nose, his black eyes jutting from their sockets, his luminous gaze, his lively careless air, and his intensely radiant personality.' His appearance was not prepossessing; he had a very short neck so that his head seemed thrust down on to his shoulders; prominent eyes that gave him a permanently startled look; and a nose tilted abruptly at the tip that earned him the nick-name at school of 'Pique-la-lune,' literally 'Peck-the-moon.'

As a young man Saint-Exupéry was painfully conscious of his ungainly appearance, which made him shy and diffident, especially with women. But any suggestion of freakishness was dispelled by a warmth and vitality of manner which his photographs rarely show. A boyish friendly grin would quickly spread across that big swarthy face, and according to Léon Werth, 'even the tip of his nose would quiver with a movement like a wink'; and when in the grip of an idea he would thrust his hands eagerly forward, palms upwards, as though wanting to offer his listeners a gift. He was a man with a strong personal magnetism.

After matriculating at Fribourg in the spring of 1917, Saint-Exupéry went to the École Bossuet in Paris, to study for the entrance examination into the French Navy. The Rector of the École Bossuet was at that time the Abbé Sudour who, by all accounts, was an interesting and remarkable person. Like so

many of the best French ecclesiastics, he was a cultivated man with considerable knowledge of the world, and he had also distinguished himself as a chaplain in the early part of the 1914-18 war. But his real vocation lay in the guidance of youth, and recognising Antoine's sensitive idealistic nature he took a paternal interest in him. He was later to come to the young man's rescue at one of the most critical moments of his life.

The Abbé may have detected, even at this age, qualities that would fit him for Holy Orders. He may have observed the underlying earnestness and intenseness in a character which, all too clearly, would never be satisfied with the life of the average sensual man, with its combination of mundane ambition and hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. But, in fact, the Abbé's influence seems to have been felt least in questions of faith. Antoine was already drifting away from the Church. Yet though he was never to practise his religion again, the effects of a Catholic education are seldom eradicated. At the end of his life, in his desperate search for a refuge and a pattern, he even hinted that he might eventually find himself a monk.

In June 1919 he sat for the naval examinations. He was ploughed and even given a bad mark in the one subject in which he might have been expected to do well—literary composition. But he was never able, now or at any other time, to conjure up emotions which did not find an echo in his own heart, or to describe events which did not follow closely his own experience; and he was bored with the subject set by the examiners: 'An Alsatian returns to his village which has again become part of France. Relate his impressions.' Antoine's impressions were nil; he sent in an almost blank paper.

Disheartened by a failure which meant the abandonment of a life-long career he spent the next eighteen months from the autumn of 1919 to the spring of 1921 drifting aimlessly in Paris without any real job or prospects and with very little money. He had a talent for drawing which was later shown in his

water-colour illustrations for *The Little Prince*, and for a time he studied architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts. In order to supplement a small allowance from his mother he became an 'extra' for a time in the opera *Quo Vadis*, then running at a theatre in the Champs-Élysées; cast as one of the Christians persecuted by Nero, he was given a few additional francs for bruises sustained in the 'arena.'

His poverty must have been acute. He ate in cheap bistros, living mainly on bread, sausage and cheese, and slept in dingy lodgings, from one of which, a dismal little hotel in the Boulevard Ornano, he wrote to his mother: 'It is no joke . . . my room is so sad . . . I haven't even the heart to sort out my collars from my socks.' But when she offered to pay his fare for a short holiday in the South of France he forbade her to stint herself for his sake.

He had many relations and friends in Paris who would gladly have given him a free meal, but out of pride he refused their hospitality. For short periods he would stay at the flat of a cousin, now the Vicomtesse de l'Estrange and a distinguished research worker at the Institut Pasteur; she still remembers the jumble and disorder of his bedroom and his habit of wandering into the flat at all hours of the day and night.

Post-war Paris was the worst place for a restless and imaginative youth prone, like all young men who have not yet found an outlet for their talents, to all the nagging terrors of failure. He had been too young to fight in the war, and the sight of the soldiers returning victorious and fêted from the Marne and other famous battlefields, made him feel both envious and inferior. There were, as Madame Jean-Jouve and another friend of this period, Louise de Vilmorin, noticed, strong narcissistic impulses which made him long, even more than other young men in his situation, to prove himself in danger and action. He felt as if he had missed for ever some vital test of his manhood.

Later on he came to recognise how important for him was

this urge to measure himself against life. 'The world,' he wrote in the first sentence of *Terre des Hommes*,¹ 'teaches us more about ourselves than any number of books, because it resists us; a man discovers himself only when he faces up to its challenge . . .' The first challenge, as it turned out, was to come to him sooner than he expected. He received in the spring of 1921 his call-up papers for military service with the French Air Force.

¹ This is omitted from the English translation: *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

CHAPTER II

MARCH WINDS

‘Mother, I adore this métier,’ was his cry of discovery to Mme. de Saint-Exupéry. ‘You cannot imagine the calm, the solitude, one finds at twelve thousand feet alone with one’s engine. And then this charming comradeship on the ground; one dozes stretched out on the grass waiting one’s turn to fly, keeps one’s eye on the plane one is going to take over and tells one another stories. They are all stories of marvels, such as about forced landings near obscure little country villages where the mayor in his patriotic excitement invites the airmen to dinner. . . . Fairy-tale adventures! They have almost all been invented on the spot but everyone marvels at them, and when one takes off in one’s turn one feels so romantic and full of hope. But nothing ever happens . . . and on landing one consoles oneself . . . by saying, “My engine heated up, old chap, I was scared . . .” It heated up so little, that poor little engine . . .’ It is a delightful letter, one of the first he ever wrote about flying, expressing the light joy and simplicity of a man’s first flying days, and the charm of little aircraft and windswept hangars; reminiscent, too, of certain lyric passages in T. E. Lawrence’s *The Mint* and David Garnett’s *Rabbit in the Air*.

But it was only after Saint-Exupéry had been in the Air Force for some time that he was allowed to qualify as a pilot. On joining up he had been sent to a squadron based near Strasbourg, where he found himself doing routine ground duties in the workshops. It was an unheroic beginning, and seeing the planes taking off and landing through the workshop windows made him eager to get his wings. The only way of

obtaining a pilot's licence quickly was to take things into his own hands. On the airfield he discovered a civil aviation company with some old Farman aircraft, and he persuaded one of the instructors to give him flying lessons. Money was short, particularly as most of his small allowance had been given away to comrades to pay for private medical treatment after youthful 'flings.' But by selling his watch and suitcase he managed to afford an hour and twenty minutes' dual instruction. Then the money ran out.

Although the average period of dual instruction is ten to fifteen hours he determined to try a solo flight at once. One afternoon he confided his plan to a mechanic, and together they seized a Sopwith from one of the hangars. The mechanic showed Saint-Exupéry the controls, and he took off in high good humour. It was the only aircraft in the air, and for twenty minutes his comrades, including the mechanic, watched it circling round and round the airfield. 'The more I stared at the ground,' Saint-Exupéry related afterwards, 'the firmer became my decision never to land again. That plane wasn't like any other. It had a worrying propensity to climb, and when one pushed down on the "stick," one had the disagreeable impression of nearing the ground far too fast.' Suddenly there was a series of explosions, and the spectators saw flames shooting from the exhaust. By some miracle he managed to bump down on to the ground, only bursting a tyre. But as he leapt out, smoke was seen pouring from his shoes.

'Hey,' shouted the mechanic. 'Your shoes are on fire!'

'Oh, yes . . . !' replied Saint-Exupéry breezily, 'I thought the engine was getting a bit warm!'

He was summoned before the Commanding Officer who exclaimed, 'You'll never kill yourself now, Saint-Ex. If you were ever going to, you'd have done it today.' This 'dicey' episode, as it would be called in the R.A.F., became a legend among his flying comrades and later throughout France.

A few days after this flight he obtained his civil pilot's licence which enabled him to train as an Air Force pilot, and, following a short period in North Africa, he was given his wings.

His first reactions to flying he later described in an unpublished novel, *L'Evasion de Jacques Bernis*, extracts from which appeared in 1926 in the magazine *Navire D'Argent*. As one would expect, there are long, enthusiastic descriptions of flights—of take-offs, landings, the thrill of handling an aircraft for the first time, the joy of looking upon the earth in a new way. Here and there he already reveals his gift for concise and vivid language, for the pregnant, evocative metaphor. For example:

The powerful wheels strain against the chocks. Flattened by the wind from the propellers, the grass for sixty feet behind flows like a river. The pilot, with a movement of his wrist, unleashes or arrests the storm.

In another passage in which veterans are talking 'shop' Saint-Exupéry conveys the delight which the young pilot feels in the responsibility of his new job with its combination of romantic adventure and tough practical realities. Later on in the narrative the pupil pilot Pichou (obviously Saint-Exupéry himself) sees a fatal accident on the airfield, and like many a young pilot, he is shocked by the apparently casual way in which his superiors regard it. With a show of bravado he tells his instructor that, despite the accident, he is ready to fly next day. To his dismay the instructor takes the remark as a matter of course. 'Naturally,' he says, 'you will do your spins tomorrow.' But Pichou soon realises that this laconic manner, far from being a sign of callousness, is deliberately assumed to hide deeper feelings.

It was not long before Saint-Exupéry himself was involved in a serious accident. One Sunday in the spring of 1923 he was flying over a fête at Versailles when his engine suddenly spluttered and cut out. He had been doing aerobatics over the crowd and

in his exuberance had forgotten to watch his petrol-gauge. Determined at all costs to avoid crashing into the holiday-makers he stretched his glide too far and, while still at some height from the ground, stalled. He was taken to hospital with a fractured skull. It seems he never expected to survive, for he murmured as he came out of his coma: 'Strange, I'm dead, yet I have all the sensations of a living man.'

Ever afterwards he was fascinated by the odd vagaries of the mind at moments of crisis. Once, later on, in the Mediterranean, when he was trapped in the fuselage of a hydro-plane beneath the water, he analysed his own sensations and reported them later to his friends.

After the Le Bourget accident, impatient to fly again, he left hospital before he was fully recovered. For some months afterwards he suffered, as a result, from attacks of vertigo.

What is the truth about Saint-Exupéry's qualities as a pilot? There is no doubt that his carelessness and absentmindedness often led to disasters. General Gelée, of the French Air Ministry, who was in the same flying unit as Saint-Exupéry in the Second World War, told us with a smile that it needed a brave man to go up with him. 'It was an adventure to fly with Saint-Ex,' he said. 'I always had to remind him to lower his under-carriage. And how annoyed he used to be! "Shut up," he would exclaim. "You've got me into a cold sweat so that I shan't be able to land at all!"' Néri, a dark vivacious little Corsican who was at one time Saint-Exupéry's wireless-operator, also referred to his absentmindedness. 'Saint-Ex. was an extraordinary chap,' he said. 'At times he was so preoccupied that he hardly seemed to know the difference between night and day. Yes, he was a crazy fellow. But all the same,' added Néri, 'one of us.'

Yet tributes have been paid by other airmen to Saint-Exupéry's coolness and skill in emergency. The famous French pilot, Jean Mermoz, relates that once in South America Saint-Exupéry found himself over an airfield where the windsock

was blowing in a direction along which the field was too narrow to land; whilst the other and longer landing-run was blocked by high tension wires lying across the approach. Without hesitation he plumped for the high tension cable, flying neatly underneath it and making a perfect 'three-pointer.' Again, one night during the Second World War, he was testing a new system of runway lighting, and suddenly found, as he came down on the approach, that the lights were no longer visible at low altitude. He decided, none the less, to attempt a landing, but just as his wheels were about to touch the ground he noticed a vehicle and a group of airmen ahead of him. In the nick of time he throttled up and, by a stroke of luck, just managed to clear them.

The truth seems to be that he was an excellent pilot when he took the trouble to concentrate, while in a crisis both his judgment and reactions were sound and quick. But all too often (and it is a well-known temptation to flyers, especially at high altitude) he allowed his mind to wander. Then he would make those small slips and errors which in the air so often prove fatal.

In the spring of 1923 Saint-Exupéry was due for demobilisation from the French Air Force. But, having set his heart on flying, he made up his mind to apply for a permanent commission. Then love suddenly intervened to upset his plans: he became engaged to Mademoiselle de Vilmorin.

Louise de Vilmorin, who is today a well-known novelist, was one of the young beauties of her time. Saint-Exupéry had been at school with her brother, and ever since had been an occasional visitor at the de Vilmorin home at Verrières-le-Buisson, near Paris. Large landowners who have done much for French forestry and agriculture, the de Vilmorins are the great seedsmen of France. They were a large, gay and informal family, who entertained a great deal. There were four sons and three daughters, the youngest of whom was Louise.

From the first he was more ardently in love than she. But once he had made up his mind he was not deterred easily, and when Louise de Vilmorin was ordered by her doctor to Switzerland Saint-Exupéry followed her; he even sold his camera to cover the expenses of the journey. There they became engaged.

But the engagement was disapproved of by the de Vilmorin family, particularly by Louise's mother, who considered that her daughter, whose health was delicate, needed a more stable home than an impoverished young airman could provide. Saint-Exupéry thereupon impetuously threw up his career in the Air Force. For the sake of love he was determined to face even something so utterly distasteful as a routine office job.

It was a brave decision which might have been disastrous. As it turned out, by releasing him from the Air Force, it eventually opened the way to his real career. But for the time being he found himself sitting miserably as an unpaid apprentice in the offices of a big tile manufacturer's in the Rue St. Honoré. He had no capacity whatever for business or indeed for regular money-making of any kind. Material possessions never meant much to him. Whenever at any time there was money in his pockets he always spent it recklessly. He also loathed the mechanical, inhuman business of checking figures, accounts and balance-sheets, even as he pitied the type of man who was condemned to do it. 'Old bureaucrat, my comrade, it is not you who are to blame,' he wrote later. 'None ever helped you to escape. You, like a termite, built your peace by blocking up with cement every chink and cranny through which the light might pierce.'¹ For a year he struggled with this uncongenial job, until its purpose suddenly collapsed. Louise de Vilmorin told him she was no longer in love with him and the engagement was broken off.

She had decided that they had little in common. She

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars.*

appears to have found Saint-Exupéry rather intense, over-serious, and even pompous. As a budding novelist, interested in the details of human personality and behaviour, she was bored by his preoccupation with metaphysics and philosophy. To a family even as informal as the de Vilmorins, he also appeared rather uncouth; they were disconcerted by his liking to pose as a working-man, turning up with dirty fingernails or clothes grimed with oil. He had the habit, too, of arriving at all hours of the night, and in the morning they would find him asleep in the hall. Probably, both Louise de Vilmorin and Saint-Exupéry were at this time too immature to be able to understand each other. But they were to remain close friends until his death.

The breaking-off of the engagement, for which he had made such sacrifices, now led to a moral crisis which was to be one of the turning-points of his life. It had not only wounded his young pride (as we have said, at this age he felt self-conscious about his appearance), but also created in him an intense spiritual bewilderment. His state of mind at this time may be gauged from the novel which he wrote a few years later in a lonely outpost of the Sahara. In *Courrier Sud*, as the novel was called, the hero, like himself, is a victim of the 'romantic agony,' a young man struggling to break away from his adolescent illusions in order to achieve manhood, independence and a sense of reality; the illusions are largely symbolised by the young girl with whom he is in love. In the end he releases himself from her spell, and having learnt his lesson returns with renewed zest to his job as an airline pilot, throwing himself with relief into the hardships and sacrifices demanded by the 'métier.' And in the fulfilment of duty he forgets his romantic obsessions.

This was soon to be Saint-Exupéry's own answer although, as we shall see, he was also fortunate in finding a leader of men sensitive enough to understand this idealism, and at the same time with the forcefulness and ability to direct it into

constructive achievement. Thus, this early episode, painful as it was, brought him self-discovery.

Restless with this inner problem Saint-Exupéry set about finding a job better suited to his taste. The first that came to hand was that of a salesman for a motor-truck firm, the Camions Saurer, where for the first time he received a salary and commission. But though he succeeded in keeping the job, he is said only to have placed a single order in the eighteen months he spent travelling the department of the Creuse in central France. His gifts were not those of the commercial traveller.

But at least he was happier. For the first two months he worked as an ordinary mechanic in the factory learning the general maintenance of ten-ton lorries. He enjoyed the manual labour, content when his hands were covered with grease and oil, feeling that he was doing a down-to-earth, honest-to-God job. All his life he was conscious of a dangerous tendency in himself to escape into the abstract; and these artisans, these simple truck-drivers and mechanics, with their concrete problems and preoccupations, gave him a sense of his own reality.

He also found himself in sympathy with them, particularly the skilled workers. He realised that in their attitude to their work they showed a self-respect and dignity comparable to the craftsmen. What a contrast to the clerks who laboured wearily in offices simply in order to earn a livelihood. 'Those who give themselves to labours of love go straight to my heart,' he wrote, and he constantly emphasises the importance of a trade, a *métier*, in bringing the best out of men. 'What constitutes the dignity of a craft is that it creates a fellowship, binds men together, and fashions for them a common language.'¹ And among these unpretentious fellow-mechanics he found a warm, spontaneous humanity and compassion which he often looked

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

for in vain among the worldly, the sophisticated and the intellectuals.

He continued throughout his life to feel this strong bond with working-class people. Referring to his time in the desert he once wrote to Doctor Pélissier: 'I have lived eight years of my life, day and night, with working-men. I have found myself sharing their table, for years at a time, as at Juby, where I was for two years the only pilot amongst a lot of mechanics. I know very well what I am talking about when I speak of working-class people, and I love them.'¹

For him the main difference between people was not one of class—or intelligence. 'It is not the intelligence which really separates men from one another. Intelligence is simply a matter of degree—of more or less. What separates men is a kind of understanding or comprehension, which exists or does not exist and which cannot be acquired; and it divides men off from one another in the same way as the whole human race is divided off from the beasts. And, with the sureness of kinsmen, people recognise this quality in one another.'

Although relatively contented in his new job he was conscious that it offered him no real prospects. It was now that his old friend and mentor, Abbé Sudour, came to the rescue. The Abbé made up his mind to find an opening in which his old pupil could use his gifts.

Amongst the many friends Sudour had made in the War was Monsieur Beppo de Massimi, who was now Managing Director of the Latécoère Airline Company, an ambitious pioneer enterprise which was then opening up, in the teeth of incredible hardships and dangers, the first air routes between France and her North African colonies. De Massimi had a great respect for Sudour, whom he had entrusted with the education of his son.

The Abbé decided that de Massimi might now be able to

¹ *Les Cinq Visages de Saint-Exupéry.*

help his old pupil. 'He spoke to me about him,' wrote de Massimi, 'in terms so eulogistic that he captured my attention.' An interview was arranged in which de Massimi was at once struck by 'this great shy boy who appeared to be so self-conscious about the size of his body, even resenting it for the space it took up in the armchair.'¹

When he was questioned about his record Saint-Exupéry was so reticent that 'he seemed almost to have lost his memory.' But he brightened up when de Massimi outlined to him the work of the Company.

'What will be my job?' the young man asked.

De Massimi hesitated. He knew that Saint-Exupéry would only be content as a pilot, but he had come to an understanding with the Abbé that he should be given an administrative job. Saint-Exupéry's family had hoped their son would become a writer, and they were afraid that he might fling away his talents, and even perhaps his life, in the risky profession of a pilot.

At that time civil aviation was still in its infancy. The Company's pilots often had to use old and obsolete machines, and they flew in all weathers over the Pyrenees, the Mediterranean and the North African desert. By now many of them had lost their lives, and the veterans were already being replaced by a new generation of pilots.

At last de Massimi replied: 'As it happens, our General Manager needs a deputy.'

Saint-Exupéry flushed. 'I'm afraid I'm only interested in a flying job.'

The sincerity in Saint-Exupéry's voice struck de Massimi; and this keenness secretly delighted him. It was such a contrast to those pilots who were always asking to be transferred to safe, administrative jobs.

He gave in. On the 11th of October, 1926, Saint-Exupéry was staying with his sister, Madame d'Agay, in the South of

¹ *Vent Debout*, by B. de Massimi.

France, when he received the following letter from the Latécoère Airline Company:

Sir,

In reply to your request of Sept. 1st for employment we have the honour to inform you that we are prepared, subject to your passing the necessary tests, to employ you on our line Toulouse-Casablanca. We ask you, therefore, to present yourself as soon as possible to our General Manager at the aerodrome of Montaudran on the Revel-Toulouse road, bringing with you your travel warrants, your flying log-book, and a passport valid for Spain.

The General Manager was Didier Daurat, a man to become one of the major influences of his life.

CHAPTER III

DIDIER DAURAT: THE ART OF LEADERSHIP

It was fortunate that the youth of one who had such an abiding love for the air should coincide with the great pioneering days of civil aviation. This was the era of the first long-distance flights which began with the crossing of the Atlantic by Alcock and Brown in 1919. In that same year a small group of Frenchmen banded together to start up an airline company (which later became proudly known as 'La Ligne') between France and French North Africa. They were patriots eager that their country should be the first in the field.¹ In the back of their minds, even as early as 1919, was the dream of extending the Line across the Atlantic to South America.

The founders of the Company were M. Pierre Latécoère and M. Beppo de Massimi. Latécoère was an enterprising French industrialist who had made armaments in the early part of the war but later turned over his factories to the construction of aircraft. De Massimi, its Managing Director, an ex-war pilot, was particularly anxious to preserve the spirit of wartime flying, and he brought into the Company a nucleus of flyers who had served with him in the French Air Force. Amongst them was his own squadron commander, Didier Daurat, a man with a brilliant war record. One of his achievements had been to spot from the air the position of the monster German cannon 'Big Bertha.'

¹ One of the first (possibly the very first) airmail flights in the world had been made in a Blériot machine on 9th September, 1911, between Hendon and Windsor. But passengers were not carried till after the war. A German company was the first in the field with a passenger service between Berlin, Leipzig and Weimar. It was inaugurated on 5th February, 1919. Three days later a French aircraft carrying passengers left Paris for London. The first British passenger-carrying flight was not made till 25th August 1919. This was also between London and Paris.

Despite the encouragement of Marshal Lyautey, then Resident-General in Morocco, these men had to contend from the outset with obstacles and difficulties. Although the Company had received permission to carry mails the French Government were reluctant to grant subsidies; and the only aircraft available were mainly old and unreliable 'crops' which had seen their best days in the war. Moreover, the only possible flying route to North Africa was by way of Barcelona, Alicante and Malaga, and the Company ran up against Spanish obstruction and ill-will in their efforts to establish landing-grounds in those places. At that time the Germans were deeply entrenched in Madrid where they exercised a strong influence on Spanish foreign policy, and every approach made by the Company to Spain was blocked by German antagonism to their ex-enemies.

Their difficulties may also be gauged from the fact that when, on 1st September, 1919, the first mail flight was inaugurated between Toulouse and French Morocco, there was extreme anxiety as to whether the performance of the aircraft would be adequate to the long and difficult flight, particularly the crossing of the Pyrenees. Although only three aircraft were detailed to make the flight—one to be piloted by Didier Daurat—seven were lined up on the airfield of Montaudran in case of mishap; and out of the Company's total reserves these seven aircraft were the only ones that were airworthy. As it turned out, the flight was successful.

Their problems did not end there. The Line could only justify its existence if it could carry mails and passengers to North Africa faster than the steamships. But night flying was then non-existent, and at this stage the Company were losing to the steamship at night what they gained over it during the day, while their aircraft were constantly at the mercy of local weather conditions.

The pilots therefore had to fly in almost all weathers. The loss of life was high. They vanished over the Mediterranean; they crashed into mountain-sides; they were brought down by

engine failure in remote corners of the desert. They dreaded most of all the crossing of the Pyrenees in mid-winter and then, when the Line was later extended to Dakar in West Africa, the crossing of hostile stretches of the Sahara.

In the Pyrenees they had to contend with turbulent air and the down and up-currents which would cause a drop of several hundreds of feet; with the icing-up which heavily overloaded their wings or froze their controls and petrol supply; and with the great black curtains of mist and cloud which suddenly blotted out visibility. The other danger arose from the unsubdued Moorish tribesmen in the Spanish colony of Rio de Oro in North Africa, a vital refuelling base on the route to Dakar. Cruel and vindictive, especially to foreigners, these Moors tortured and sometimes murdered airmen luckless enough to fall into their hands.

It was largely due to the drive and ingenuity of Didier Daurat that these difficulties were eventually surmounted. It was Daurat who, mindful of the competition from the steamships, issued the directive that crews must fly in almost all weathers; and he also showed them by his personal example that it was possible to fly above cloud, even above cloud thick and dense enough to obscure the earth. He taught them to recognise rifts and openings in the cloud bank through which they could get down in comparative safety. It was Daurat, too, who first thought of using carrier pigeons which enabled a crew, forced down in the Mediterranean or the Pyrenees, to send a message back to base and, later, when aircraft were equipped with wireless he established listening-posts along the Spanish coast which transmitted weather reports to pilots in the air. And, finally, it was Daurat who, by parleys and negotiations with the local Sheiks and Caids, tried to mitigate the savage brutalities of the Moorish tribesmen in the Rio de Oro.

At one moment he was actually called upon to quell a mutiny which had broken out amongst the pilots at Casablanca who suddenly refused to fly this dangerous stretch of the desert

after the Moors had attacked and fired upon two of their comrades. He lessened the danger by arranging that aircraft should henceforth fly the Rio de Oro in convoys of two or three: if one aircraft came down in hostile territory another could then immediately land beside it and, in case of attack, rescue the crew and the mails. As an additional precaution an Arab interpreter also flew with the convoy.

Daurat's real preoccupation, however, was not with the commercial success of the Latécoère Airline Company, but with the personalities of the men whom he commanded. An idealist and an ascetic, he was primarily interested in human nature and the forging of men's minds and characters according to his own severe principles; and the perils and hardships of the Line gave him the perfect opportunity to put those principles into practice.

His view of human nature can be summed up in three simple precepts: that human nature, like clay, is infinitely malleable ('*L'homme c'est de la pâte*'—to use his own phrase); that human nature, left to itself and without guidance or inspiration, remains at the level of mediocrity; that human nature needs leadership to crystallise and shape its obscure urges to self-fulfilment—to rescue it from the temptations of that mediocrity. He was a man who combined Christian pity for his fellow-men with a Nietzschean ardour and determination to make them transcend themselves—to perfect their own natures through the life of heroism, self-discipline and sacrifice. He was a creative artist whose medium, instead of being paint or words, happened to be man.

He selected his crews from all classes and backgrounds, judging them by their loyalty to one another and to the spirit of the Line. As Madame Guillaumet, the widow of Henri Guillaumet, one of the pilots of the Line, expressed it: 'My husband and Antoine came from totally different backgrounds. Antoine was an aristocrat by birth, whereas my husband's family had been peasants in the Champagne for generations. But it was wonderful

to see how Daurat took men from different classes and welded them together and made them realise something higher in themselves.' As a result, 'the spirit of the Line' was to become famous as a phrase throughout France.

Daurat's attitude to these men is summed up in Saint-Exupéry's *Night Flight*: 'Love the men under your orders but do not let them know it.' A man of few words and a hard disciplinarian, he exacted a high standard of efficiency. Stories of his harshness are innumerable. For instance, a pilot one day was flying two passengers to North Africa, when he remarked to them that he was surprised they had not taken the boat as it was safer and more comfortable than travel by air. The observation was repeated to Daurat who promptly dismissed the pilot, remarking later: 'It was hard for the pilot to lose his job, but it was still harder for me to dismiss him: there is nothing sadder than to see a man surpassed by the job.' The man in question was one of the many ex-war pilots who, after the war, had flocked to the Line but who, apart from their salaries, took no interest in its work.

In *Night Flight* Saint-Exupéry portrays Daurat in the character of Rivière, as the lonely, aloof leader torn between his desire, on the one hand, to develop to the full the moral potentialities of his men, and his knowledge, on the other, that to do so means depriving them of their normal human right to family life and security. For he was intolerant of any influence that might distract his men from the job. Thus, he had no use for the type of woman who attempted to stand between her husband and the risks of his career, and he made it a rule that no woman should cross the boundaries of the airfields. This rule he took to extraordinary lengths. Once at Dakar when Madame Guillaumet was standing beside the hangars she saw her husband's aircraft take off, crash and burst into flames. But she did not dare run to his rescue. Such restraint must have been torturing, especially as many airmen died leaving behind them wives and young children. Yet Daurat kept the respect

of both the crews and their wives. 'Although he demanded these sacrifices from us,' Madame Guillaumet said, 'Daurat is at heart a saint.' Daurat himself admits today that he was a hard man, but adds that strict discipline was essential if pilots were not to sacrifice their own and their comrades' lives by divided allegiance.¹

Despite his ruthlessness Daurat was a humanitarian. He believed in the fundamental goodness of human nature while recognising that this goodness only becomes apparent in certain, and perhaps exceptional, conditions. He realised, for instance, that men were ready to sacrifice themselves for an ideal when it captured their hearts and imaginations; and the heroism shown in the last war, or in Communist underground movements, or amongst Catholic priests and laity behind the Iron Curtain, shows he was not entirely wrong.

In the early days of civil aviation the Line made the same imaginative appeal. It was not only that these men were spurred on by the excitement of doing something never done before, but also that they firmly believed that they were serving the cause of humanity. Like many airmen in those days, they saw the possibilities of commercial aviation in an idealistic light. 'Our very psychology,' Saint-Exupéry later wrote, 'has been shaken to its most secret recesses. Our notions of separation, absence, distance, return, are reflections of a new set of realities, though the words themselves remain unchanged. To grasp the meaning of the world today we use a language created to express the world of yesterday.'² It was believed that the aeroplane, by linking the world more closely together, would break

¹ Note: Madame Guillaumet herself is an exceptional woman who combines the Parisian's gaiety and charm with all the steadfastness and strength of character of the French bourgeoisie. She sacrificed her own interests for the sake of her husband's flying career, cheerfully accepting its dangers and anxieties; and in so doing she became herself, in her own way, a part of the Line and its spirit. She now recalls those days with pride. She keeps a little bookshop in the Avenue Friedland near the Étoile in Paris which she bought (as she put it) 'for something to do when Henri was killed.' This bookshop soon became a meeting-place for the veterans of the Line.

² *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

down the spiritual barriers between man and man, nation and nation; it would also bring the benefits of civilisation to remote peoples, as the crews of the Line were already doing to the desert tribes of North Africa.

Thus, for Daurat and his pilots flying became a means of dedication, as it was in this country for T. E. Lawrence and so many unknown airmen. 'It seems to me,' Lawrence wrote towards the end of his life, 'that the conquest of the air is the only major task of our generation'; and he went on to explain that, in his view, progress would no longer be due to the work of isolated geniuses, but to the communal effort of the new skilled mechanics and technicians of the mechanical age. In this he was expressing the inarticulate feelings of many who saw hope in an alliance of humanism with technocracy. The possibilities—negative and positive—of science and technics obviously open up vast fields for discussion, particularly since the discovery of atomic energy; and the overwhelming implications of these problems were to dog Saint-Exupéry in his last years.

Daurat today is the director of Orly Airport. To look at he is not in the least impressive; in fact he looks rather like the Englishman's idea of the French bourgeois—plump, round-faced, small in stature. Indifferent to appearances he usually wears an old hat and an old mackintosh faded by sun and rain; and he smokes incessantly, lighting and relighting the stub of a Gaulois cigarette. But he has that direct simplicity of manner and speech which often characterises great men; he has the knack of reducing the complex problems and activities of life to simple proportions. One leaves his presence with a curious feeling of exhilaration and excitement as though one had suddenly come closer to the heart and core of things.

In his simple, direct fashion he spoke to us about Saint-Exupéry. 'But for the Line and its dangers would there ever have been a Saint-Exupéry?' he asked us. Then he went on:

'When Saint-Exupéry joined us he was an immature young man, but through our trials and struggles he discovered himself—and his fellow-men. He discovered another, a nobler side of human nature which was to determine his whole outlook on life. But we were fortunate to possess a Saint-Exupéry who could express in unforgettable language what all of us felt in our own way, but could not have put into words.'

The influence of Daurat's radiating personality shows throughout Saint-Exupéry's life and work. Daurat instilled into him a respect for human nature and a sense of the possibilities open to it. He showed him that certain values like courage, loyalty, and responsibility towards one's fellows, are absolute, sacred and eternal values because they give meaning and purpose to human effort and to our whole life on earth; and therefore, it is the function of man to practice these virtues, not for gain or other ulterior motives, but independently, for their own sake and for the sake of the whole human body. Saint-Exupéry made this clear when he summed up the spirit of the Line in a phrase: 'Le courrier est sacré; ce qu'il y a dedans a peu d'importance.' ('The mail is sacred; what it contains is of little importance.')

The essence of Saint-Exupéry's view of life was that man, by the use of his moral powers, his imagination and his creative ability, qualities that set him apart from the other animals, can to a certain degree transform the raw materials, the crude clay of life, into an intelligible design. Out of the chaos of nature he can, through his struggles and efforts, create a formula, a pattern by which he gives worth and significance to his existence. 'The spirit alone, if it breathes upon the clay, can create Man' is the concluding line of *Wind, Sand and Stars*. This, as Saint-Exupéry came to realise, was the very task that Daurat had set himself.

After all the dismal futile years in business Saint-Exupéry was happy to be back—back in the vivid, adventurous world of flying and flying men. For the time being he was not to be

allowed to fly himself. He had had a brief and disillusioning interview about this with the General Manager. Daurat had scrutinised him closely, asked for details of his flying experience and then sent him for a spell in the workshops. But Daurat, whose interviews rarely lasted more than three minutes, expected his pilots to be, in case of emergency, efficient mechanics as well as pilots.

Although he longed to be in the air he loved the workshops with their rich smell of engine oil and the happy backchat and laughter of his workmates; and in his off-duty hours he would listen eagerly to the veteran pilots telling of their adventures with the Line. Weary, preoccupied, they were apt to treat the novices with aloofness and condescension, but occasionally they would let slip a remark which conjured up fabulous exploits in the ice-capped Pyrenees or amongst wild Moorish tribes in the Sahara.

In Toulouse the pilots lodged at 'Le Grand Balcon'—a modest pension kept by three pious old ladies—and there he would watch them as, back from Alicante or Casablanca or Dakar, they took their places at table, grimy, rain-soaked, faces strained from battles with wind and storm; and he would contrast their rugged strength and zest for life with the 'shut-in' souls of the office clerks and employees seated beside them at the table d'hôte.

The two comrades of whom we hear most are Jean Mermoz and Henri Guillaumet. Mermoz, whom Saint-Exupéry only came to know really well later on, is a fascinating figure. He recalls to mind the Elizabethan and Renaissance buccaneers—in his dash and boldness of spirit; in his love of bravado and panache; in the violence of his ambition; in his fantastic achievements as an airman whilst still in the first flush of youth; and in the hectic, fevered quality of his life, particularly of his love life. He was to become one of the greatest of French pilots.

Henri Guillaumet was an utterly different character. Descended from a long line of peasants he was stolid, simple-hearted,

reliable and above all responsible; and unlike Mermoz he was completely indifferent to public flattery and hero-worship. In *Night Flight* Saint-Exupéry has given a subtle picture of the relationship between him and Daurat in the characters of Pellerin and Rivière. Rivière 'loved him because he talked only of his trade, referring to his flights as a blacksmith to his anvil.'

'From the moment they first met Henri and Antoine were like brothers,' Madame Guillaumet remarked, and she added that it was partly the peasant in her husband which appealed to Saint-Exupéry. Complex himself, he envied his friend's simple, extraverted nature. Guillaumet's approach to flying, as Saint-Exupéry observed, was that of the craftsman; he would undertake a risky flight in an unemotional matter-of-fact way though well aware of its dangers. He once remarked to his wife: 'I shall never see the other side of forty,' and he turned out to be right. He was killed in the Second World War.

Madame Guillaumet also noticed the curious fact that, whereas her husband, the peasant, was a born and a natural leader of men, Saint-Exupéry, the aristocrat, liked taking orders. In this Saint-Exupéry recalls T. E. Lawrence who, as an aircraftsman in the R.A.F., also found peace of mind in unquestioning obedience to his superiors, however harsh their orders might be. For Lawrence the R.A.F. was 'the best modern equivalent to entering a monastery in the Middle Ages,' combining submission and dedication; and Saint-Exupéry in later life often said that if he had faith he would become a monk.

Both men, too, were inclined to introspection, nagged by a sense of isolation from life. No one who reads *The Mint*, particularly its beautiful concluding chapter, can doubt that it was partly this tendency which drove Lawrence into a group life in the ranks of the R.A.F. Saint-Exupéry was a victim of this same loneliness which made him constantly afraid of being left out of things. The role of the outsider, the spectator, was always hateful to him: and even the profession of a writer, inasmuch as it implied for him a certain mental detachment

from his fellow-beings, he found distasteful. 'I don't want to be a writer,' he would tell his fellow-pilots, 'I want to play a part in things, to be one of you.' There may have been a touch of affectation in this remark, but it reflected a genuine impulse in his nature, an almost neurotic fear of being 'outside'—of not being, as he often put it, ('dans la bagarre'). 'in the fray'

Every pilot of the Company had to undergo a test in the presence of Daurat before he was allowed to fly on the Line. Saint-Exupéry had finished with the workshops; he had done a course on meteorology; and now he was ready for his flying test. He was apprehensive. Everybody had heard the story of Mermoz' test a couple of years before. Mermoz, determined to show off his own skill, had looped the aircraft, made a number of steep turns and then side-slipped down to a perfect landing. Proud of his performance he walked confidently towards the General Manager. The verdict was terse: 'We want pilots here, not acrobats. Join a circus!' Mermoz was hot-tempered but controlled his anger . . . and went back for a further spell in the workshops.

Saint-Exupéry fared better, and having passed his test satisfactorily, graduated on to practice flights between Toulouse and Perpignan; he also flight-tested new types of aircraft. They were primitive machines by modern standards. 'We flew open ships,' he wrote, 'thrusting our heads round the windshield to take our bearings: the wind that whistled in our ears was a long time clearing out of our heads.' Nor could a pilot trust the engines of these ancient biplanes—Bréguets, Salmsons, Latés, Farmans—which would suddenly cut out in mid-air, or even occasionally 'drop out without warning with a great rattle like the crash of crockery.'¹

During one of these test flights he was burned and momentarily blinded by petrol which spurted into his face from a leak in the engine. But a touch of danger, he realised, made the job not

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars.*

only more exhilarating but more worth while. 'It isn't easy to explain,' he wrote in a letter, 'but that is exactly how I like flying to be. It should be a *métier*, not a sport for gigolos. Latécoère is reproached for being hard on his pilots, but I like it when they don't ask you whether or not it pleases you to fly.' Daurat's lesson—the lesson of salvation through strenuous endeavour—had been well and truly learned.

One evening, not long afterwards, Saint-Exupéry was suddenly called to the General Manager's office. 'You'll fly tomorrow,' Daurat told him in his usual abrupt fashion. 'I take it you know the regulations?' Then, aware of the young pilot's keen, impetuous nature, he slowed him up with a word of caution: 'It's all very fine to navigate on your compass over Spain in a sea of cloud. It's very stylish but'—and then he lowered his voice—'remember, below that sea of cloud lies eternity.'

Saint-Exupéry left the room proud of himself, 'but at the same time very humble, feeling myself ill-prepared for the responsibility.' Hitherto he had only flown twice as second pilot on the Toulouse-Barcelona-Alicante service. But now, as captain of the aircraft, he felt anxious, wondering where on the route he could make a forced landing in case of emergency. He decided to consult the calm, wise, practical Guillaumet.

Guillaumet received him with a reassuring grin, poured out a drink, rolled up his shirt sleeves and brought out the maps; and together in the lamplight the two men went over, stage by stage, the route to Barcelona. 'Shoulder to shoulder with the veteran,' says Saint-Exupéry, 'I felt a sort of schoolboy peace.'

As the night wore on his anxieties gradually faded away. Guillaumet unfolded for him not the Spain of tourist or traveller, but a new Spain, secret, intimate, exclusive, known only to the airman. He did not tell him about the majesty of mountains or rivers, or about the size of towns and cities, or about the proverbial Spanish temperament. He did not tell him,

for instance, about the church at Guadix but about three orange trees on the borders of its airfield which a pilot might fail to notice as he came in to land. 'Beware of those trees—mark them on the map.' He did not mention the great Ebro river but a little brook, hidden by water weeds, running through a field. 'Careful of that brook; it breaks up the whole field. Mark it on your map.' Then there was a meadow used as a landing-strip where the farmer did not keep an eye on his livestock. 'You think the meadow empty and then bang! there are thirty sheep under your wheels.'

After leaving Guillaumet Saint-Exupéry strolled among the crowds in the streets of Toulouse. It was a freezing starry winter's night, and the shop-windows, dazzlingly lit, were filled with a festive display of wares. 'In the sight of all this wealth,' he says, 'I felt intoxicated with the pride and joy of renunciation.' Of what little account were all the riches of the earth compared to the unswerving, honest-to-God friendship of a Guillaumet; to the ties which bound him to the airmen of the Line through their mutual struggles and perils; and to flying with its dangers, its triumphs, its frigid ecstasies. As he walked through the streets in this exalted frame of mind he looked into the faces of the passers-by, not with envy but with pity. 'What could they know of those stars that one by one were going out? I alone was in the confidence of the stars. . . . My footfall rang in a universe that was not theirs.'

Next morning he was up at four. Half an hour later he was rattling over the cobbles of Toulouse in the Company's old omnibus; he found himself sandwiched between a sleepy customs guard and a few glum clerks and inspectors 'who were about to take up their dreary daily tasks, their red tape, their monotonous lives.' As they reached the airfield the first pale, fitful streaks of light were showing in the sky.

Then he took off for Spain, climbing higher and higher to cross the Pyrenees.

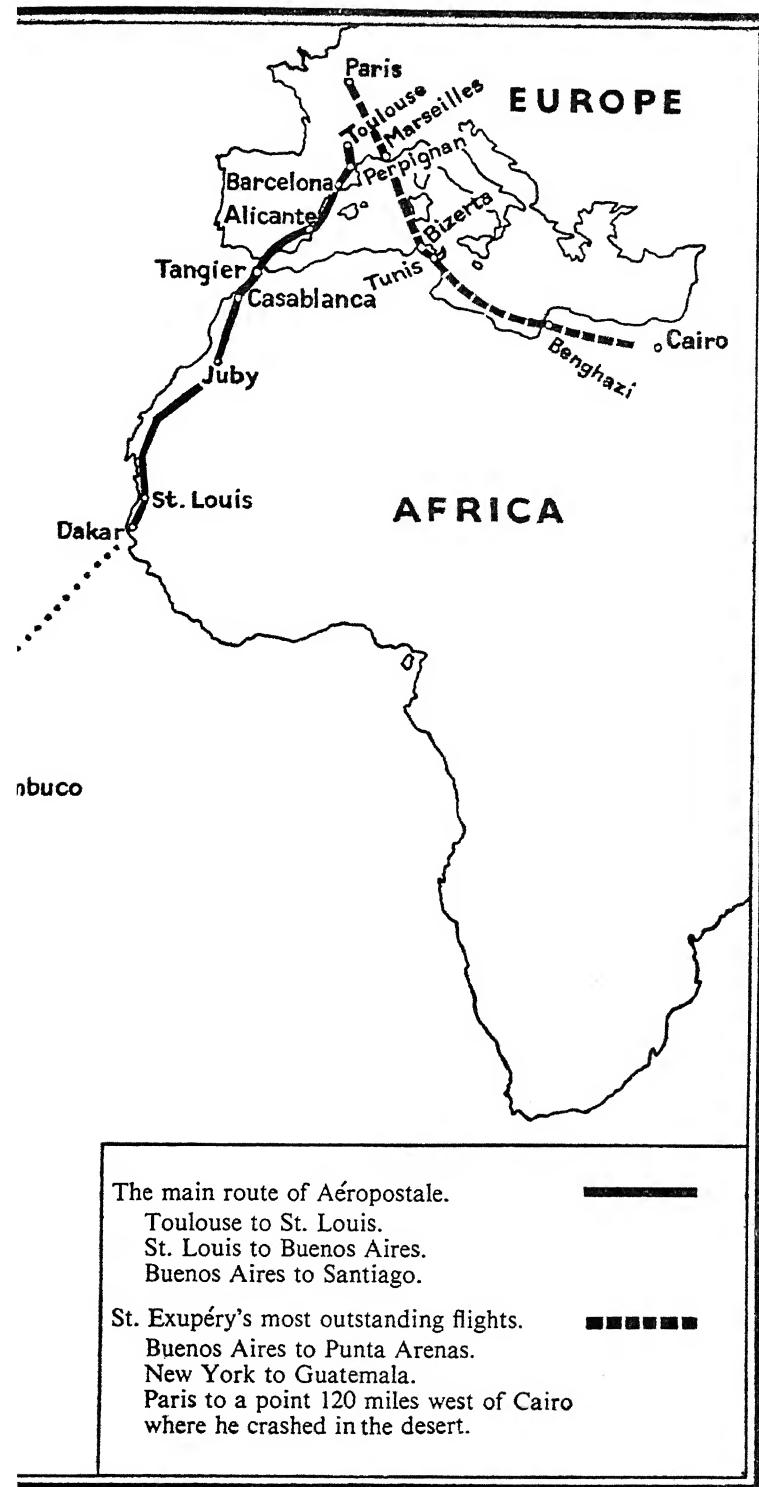
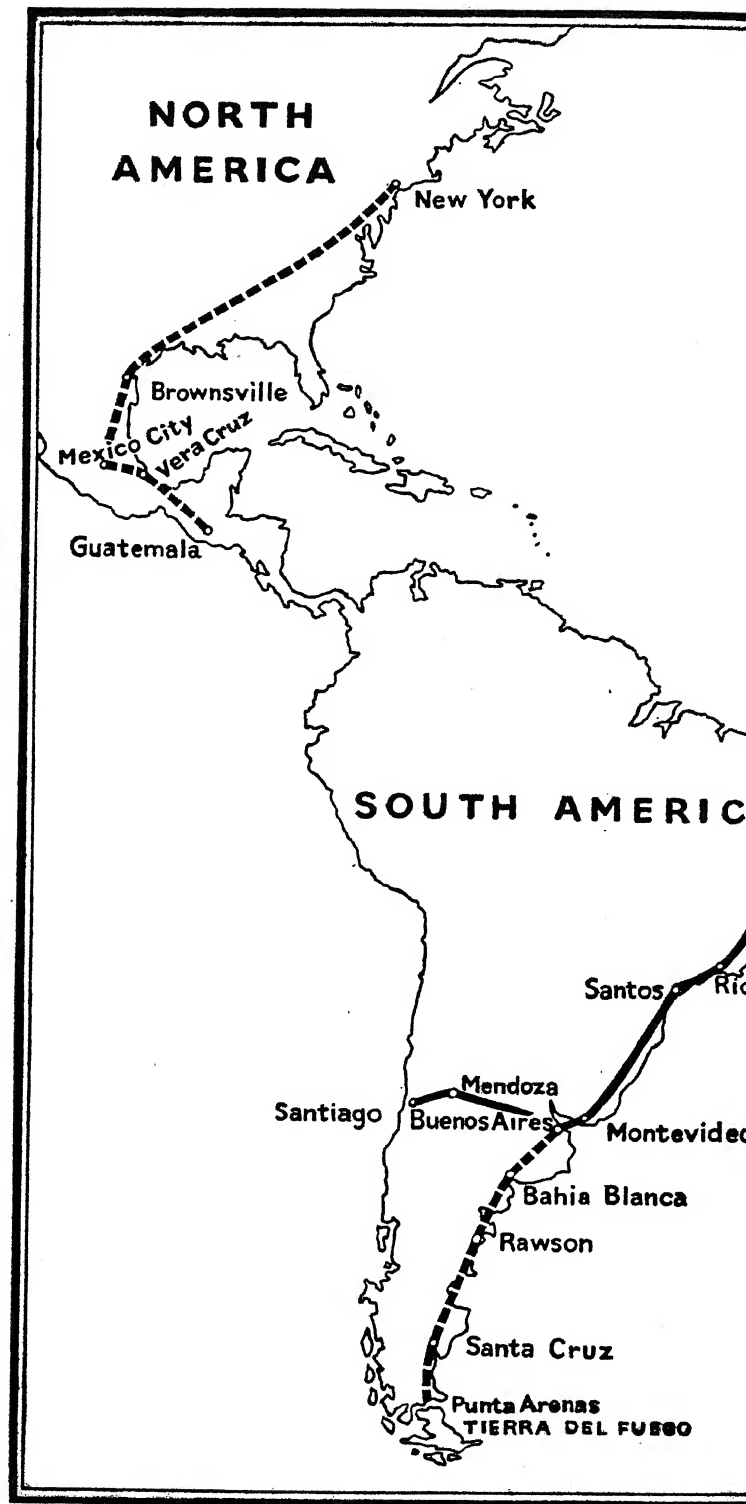
CHAPTER IV

EXPANDING HORIZONS

What was the secret of Saint-Exupéry's life-long devotion to the air? For him flying was not simply a beloved profession, but a vocation, a way of life, which satisfied in him, particularly in these dangerous pioneering days, something akin to religious ardour. There was the call to hardship, sacrifice, the renunciation of earthly things, including, if necessary, the surrender of one's life—what he calls 'the dark sense of duty greater even than that of love'; there was the vision of a wider, purer, more spacious universe, unsullied by the pettinesses and contingencies of every-day life; and there was the comradeship born out of danger and the common love for the métier, wherein men discovered their own and each other's true worth. All his life Saint-Exupéry felt this devotion to the air, a devotion intensely mysterious because, ultimately, it was something beyond himself.

'I fly,' he once told a friend, 'because it releases my mind from the tyranny of petty things; it gives me a sense of the wider horizons.' And that was probably as near as he ever came to finding the source of his love.

Throughout *Wind, Sand and Stars* runs this sense of a wider, more open-hearted, more generous view of things—a view which the airman acquires in the giant perspectives and solitudes of the air. In other words, he comes to think of the earth as a tiny planet, compared to the universe itself, to the moons, suns and galaxies of stars surrounding it: and yet for that very reason it becomes to him all the more beloved and familiar. This theme was already implied in the French title of the book: *Terre des Hommes*.



There was something, too, about the air that appealed to the mystic in him. For the pilot not only sees the earth in a wider perspective, but also comes into a new and different relationship to it. It is as though, in the process of acquiring what is called 'air-sense,' he were leading a life in two dimensions. As soon as he leaves the ground he sloughs off his ties with the earth: locked up in his cockpit he is engrossed with the note of his engine, with the dials on his instrument panel, with the fitful perversities of the weather; he is only concerned now with the earth in so far as it yields him landmarks—those towns and lakes, those rivers and railways, which enable him to pinpoint his position.

The pilot also enters into a vital active relationship with the whole world of Nature in which by day he is concerned with the speed and direction of winds, and at night fixes his position by the stars. Saint-Exupéry particularly stresses that intimate association between the pilot and the elements. The scene, he says, may be commonplace for the passenger, but 'from the moment of taking off it is animated with a powerful magic for the crew. . . . To the pilot the sight of clouds massing on the horizon is no mere spectacle but a matter of concern to his physical being. . . and between him and it a bond is formed which is a veritable language.' And as he grows familiar with this new world—as he learns more and more to speak the language of cloud and wind and star—the airman feels as though he were conversing with the whole universe; he debates whether he will assault this mountain-range, or allow himself to be swallowed up in that cloud, or whether he will make a detour over the sea. 'There is a peak ahead, still distant. The pilot will not reach it before another hour of flight in the night. What is the significance of that peak? On a night of full moon it will be a useful landmark. In fainter moonglow it will be a bit of wreckage strewn in shadow, dangerous, but marked clearly enough by the lights of villages. But if the pilot flies blind, has bad luck in correcting his drift, is dubious about his

position, that peak begins to stir with a strange life and its threat fills the breadth of the night sky . . .'

Compared with his moments of liberation the pilot inevitably finds that life on earth is sombre. What about the ordinary men and women who do not fly? How are they to free themselves from their egotisms as the pilot has learnt to do, at least while he is in the air? At the beginning of *Terre des Hommes* (the passage is omitted from *Wind, Sand and Stars*) Saint-Exupéry recalls a night when he was flying over the plains of the Argentine. It was overcast but 'across the plain there shone, like the stars, a few scattered lights. . . . In that ocean of darkness each one signalled the miracle of a human consciousness. In that house someone would be reading, or meditating, or exchanging confidences; in that other one, perhaps, someone would be making love. But amongst those living stars, how many windows fastened, how many stars extinguished, how many men asleep . . .'

By the spring of 1927 Saint-Exupéry was flying the regular service between Toulouse and Casablanca, and in a series of playful and intimate letters to a young girl in Paris, Mademoiselle Lucie-Marie Decour, he gave a vivid picture of these first days of active service with the Line. On one flight, he tells her, he ran into a blinding snowstorm in the valley of Lorca which completely blotted out the mountain peaks. Never could he have believed, he wrote, that an aeroplane could stand up to buffetings so severe that within a few seconds it might be hurtled down from six thousand to sixty feet. 'But I had been warned that as soon as I was almost level with the ground my controls would respond again. Otherwise I should have let go of them. I felt myself such a complete plaything of the elements.'

A month or two afterwards he was promoted to the Casablanca-Dakar stretch. This route, which included the perilous crossing of the Rio de Oro, had been operated by the Company for the previous two years. It was during a flight

across this territory that he had an experience, which, though weird, is not unusual for an airman. One night he and his wireless operator, Néri, were trying to land at Villa Cisneros, then a re-fuelling point in the Rio de Oro about half-way between Casablanca and Dakar. As they approached the airfield they ran into dense fog, but flew on until Néri suddenly saw a light glimmering through the murk. With relief he signalled to Cisneros: 'Your beacon in view; confirm by flashing three times.' But there was no response. And then they suddenly realised that the light was, in fact, a star.

Completely lost, they roamed about in the thickening fog, steering on star after star, hoping that each one might be the longed-for beacon. But every time they flashed out a signal they met with the same blank stare. 'Incorruptible stars,' exclaimed Saint-Exupéry, 'which would not so much as wink.' Their eyes, tired with peering through the mist, now saw everywhere flashes of light, phantom shapes, delusive signs; and they began to imagine, half seriously, half in jest, that perhaps they had 'slipped beyond the confines of this world.'

Finally messages from Cisneros and other airfields along the route came through, and they were able to get their bearings. Among the signals was a particularly incongruous one. 'Monsieur de Saint-Exupéry,' it read, 'I am obliged to recommend that disciplinary action be taken against you in Paris for having flown too low over the hangars on your departure from Casablanca.' They burst out laughing, for they felt that they had been 'lost in interplanetary space amongst a thousand inaccessible planets.'

Saint-Exupéry did not at first take the perils of the Rio de Oro very seriously. Swept suddenly from the sedate provincialism of Toulouse into this exotic world, where terrors lurked in the sands, he felt a reckless, heady exhilaration. 'It is full of sport,' he wrote to his family. 'Last year two pilots were killed—and I've the honour of being fired on like a partridge for a thousand

kilometres. The other thousand are more peaceful. On each mail flight we fly two thousand kilometres on the way out and two thousand kilometres back. I've already had to make a forced landing in the desert but the other plane (we fly in convoy) was able to rescue me. I'd landed on good hard sand. If I hadn't been rescued it might not have been so amusing . . .'

Once he and his co-pilot—it was probably the first time he was at close grips with the desert—came down between Agadir and Dakar. A broken connecting-rod had sent them crashing into a sand dune. Guillaumet, who was acting as escort, landed beside them, and they transferred the mail bags to his plane. As a single aircraft could not carry the three of them Guillaumet and the co-pilot flew off to the nearest outpost, promising to return later for Saint-Exupéry. Before taking off they handed him with great solemnity a gun and two clips of cartridges. 'Don't be shy on the trigger,' they warned him. 'Fire on the slightest provocation.' This time Saint-Exupéry took the danger seriously. He kept the gun close at hand.

At sunset his friends returned. They asked him with, apparently, genuine concern if he had seen anything. He had seen only a little gazelle, with which he had tried to make friends, but he was too shy to mention it. The two others then confessed the joke. They had left him in perfect safety in a part of the desert where the tribes had long since been pacified and subdued.

All three men then passed a hilarious night in the fort of Nouatchott, a lonely desert outpost in charge of a French sergeant and fifteen Senegalese soldiers. The sergeant seldom received visits from other Frenchmen, and they sat up late with him, drinking and swapping stories. In the solitude of the desert these chance meetings took on a rare warmth and intimacy which delighted Saint-Exupéry.

As a relaxation from flying he went out on hunting expeditions into the wilderness. 'I have been hunting lions in Mauritania on the borders of the Sahara,' he wrote enthusiastically to a

friend. 'Four days of travel in the desert. Not even a camel track. We navigated across the sands avoiding the dunes, and at night bivouacked in encampments where our two vehicles aroused first fear and then admiration. When we run into herds we requisition sheep. It is a "grand seigneur" life.'

The Arab towns and villages along the route of the Line were also explored. He loved the austere feeling of these 'Beau Geste' towns standing right out in the naked desert with the hard sun glinting on their green-topped minarets and encircling fortifications. But he disliked the larger French colonial towns and in particular 'dilapidated and derelict' Dakar. There he came up against his old enemies, the petty bureaucrats, pre-occupied with their illnesses and their shabby domestic cares, their household accounts and their local jealousies. 'When,' he wrote, 'I compare all that to my love of the Arabs and even the Moors and their country . . . after all those places along the Line what a dead-and-alive hole Dakar is.'

Now, for the first time, he was earning a little money, and he visited the Arab bazaars to buy carpets and other amenities for his rough-and-ready sleeping quarters in these remote desert stations. Then there were casual flirtations with local beauties so while away his leisure. In a letter to Mademoiselle Decour, written in a light, rather whimsical vein, he mentions one or two of these liaisons, in particular one with a little dancing-girl.

His real love remained the desert. 'I lived three years in the Sahara,' he wrote later. 'I also, like so many others, have been gripped by its spell. Anyone who has known life in the Sahara . . . mourns those years as the happiest of his life.'¹

He realised that the desert heightened a man's awareness, sharpening his imagination and senses, which made up for the lack of outer resources. Apparently monotonous stretches of sand became enriched by the memories built up around them while even the silences of the desert were various and different.

¹ *Letter to a Hostage.*

There was the silence of peace, of tribal reconciliation; the silence—a kind of ominous hush—which preceded the coming of a sandstorm; the silence of high noon when the sun suspends all activities; and the silence of ambush and intrigue while the Moors were plotting their raids.

He noticed, too, how in that sparse wilderness every visible feature of the landscape took on an enhanced value. Some small and otherwise insignificant object, a dune, a palm tree, or even a bunch of scattered camel thorn, was singled out by the eye; while an oasis, because it was green, growing and alive, was regarded almost with religious reverence. On entering it an Arab would pay it homage by plunging his hands into the gushing little spring from which it drew its life; and only then would he enjoy the shade of the great date palms or wander through its groves, green, cool and luscious with peach and apricot and pomegranate. Saint-Exupéry relates that some Bedouin chiefs were once flown to France on a goodwill mission in an aircraft of the Line. They were not half so impressed by the Eiffel Tower and the other sights of Paris as by a huge waterfall which they were shown in the French Alps. These men had never seen a forest, or a river, or a rose-tree in bloom.

Despite the excitements of this new life there were moments in which he was both lonely and homesick. When Mademoiselle Decour announced her forthcoming marriage he brought up again, with pathos, the fear which continually haunted him of being on the periphery rather than in the centre of things. 'I take as much interest in your happiness as though I were your brother. I am terribly sad to lose even a small measure of our friendship. All my friends get married, after which things are never quite the same. They build their little walls about them, and then I have the feeling of being shut out. Once upon a time I did not mind it; I said to myself: "That is another hearth that welcomes me." I felt then that I had in the world little refuges in which I could be happy—the stable, enduring things

which I could always count upon. But everything around me is in flux, starting with my changes of quarters. I can always do without these things—the enduring things—but all the same I do love them. I become rather anxious if conditions change a great deal when I am far away. Try to be a friend still: it is unlikely that things will be quite the same. I have seen it too often. I admit that I am a bad correspondent, that I appear forgetful or distraught, but that is not the real truth. I have such need of certain things . . .’ But he ended the letter by telling her that marriage can bring not only a sense of purpose but that rare and blessed moment of fulfilment in which through love all conflicts and complexities are gathered together and resolved. It was a romantic attitude, and when he applied it to his own marriage later it inevitably led to disappointment.

As might be expected in a character so unstable, the pendulum swung uneasily between the life of action and the longing for a solid, unvarying rhythm and background. ‘At times I think I am mad,’ he wrote to the same girl. ‘I ask myself what I am seeking in all this life. I ask myself if, after all, the most intelligent thing is not to try to find happiness.’ And then he goes on to contrast the empty arid desert with the green, smiling fields of France, with the boulevards of Paris thronged with elegant, spritely, attractive women, with the opportunities for culture, pleasure and gaiety which exist in that effervescent capital.

But these moments of self-distrust were transitory. It was typical of a certain perversity in his nature that he thought of his country with nostalgia when he could no longer enjoy it. Not long after he was assuring Mademoiselle Decour that he had ‘chosen the hardest and most uncertain life because otherwise I believe one amounts to nothing.’

In October 1927 Saint-Exupéry was on leave in Paris when he was hurriedly summoned to take charge of the Company’s vital refuelling station at Juby in the Rio de Oro. This new job was to mark another stage in his development. During the last

year he had been leading the life of the ordinary pilot—a life of sensation rather than of thought—but now he was suddenly entrusted with wider responsibilities. He was brought into contact with all kinds and conditions of men through whom he acquired a deeper understanding of human nature. It was the beginning of his intellectual maturity.

His appointment was the result of a critical situation at Juby. Since the very earliest days relations between the Line and the Spanish Government had been strained. The concessions granted by the Spaniards to the French Airline Company were intensely resented by the Germans in Madrid, who hoped that their own air lines would eventually operate the route to South America. De Massimi had succeeded, nevertheless, in overcoming Spanish reluctance to grant him landing-fields both in Spain and in the Rio de Oro. But now an altogether new problem had sprung up. The Spaniards were finding it almost impossible to subdue the refractory Moorish tribes in the Rio de Oro, and the sudden appearance of the French Company, whose airmen were soon being captured and held up to ransom and sometimes even murdered by these tribes, increased the general state of lawlessness and rebellion. The situation was rapidly getting out of hand, lowering Spanish prestige both in the eyes of the Moors and the world outside.

Since 1925, the year in which the Company had begun to operate this new route, there had been numerous incidents which received world-wide publicity. On the 22nd of July, 1925, two French pilots, Rozes and Ville, had to shoot themselves out of an affray with a band of armed Moors who attacked them after a forced landing; and in this incident two Moors lost their lives. In December of the same year another pilot, Marcel Reine—a wild, charming, devil-may-care youth—was taken prisoner in the desert, and the Moors only released him on payment of an exorbitant ransom.

In the following year Jean Mermoz had an even more harrowing experience. After being captured, he was locked

up in a cage like a wild beast, and transported by caravan across the desert for days and nights on end; and never once had he seen the face of the Chief of the tribe which remained hidden behind a black veil. For a month after his release—on payment of a ransom of a thousand pesetas—he suffered from the effects of thirst and exposure.

Then, on the 11th of November, 1926, two airmen, Gourp and Erable, were flying across this region in convoy carrying a Spanish mechanic, Pintado. Gourp was forced down by engine failure at Cap Bojador on the coast, Erable then landed to pick him up and the three men were set upon by tribesmen. Erable and Pintado were killed outright while Gourp, wounded in the spine, was carried off by his captors. In his agony he tried vainly to end his life by drinking a bottle of tincture of iodine. He was rescued on payment of the usual ransom but died a few days later in hospital at Casablanca.

The publicity given to these incidents had infuriated the Spaniards, and they were now threatening to stop all further flights across the Rio de Oro. At Cap Juby the Governor, Colonel de la Pena, was particularly antagonistic, and seemed to be going out of his way to offer gratuitous insults to the Company. He denied them the use of the only existing hangar, which meant that their aircraft were exposed to the heat, humidity and sand-storms of the desert; he refused them the right to put up beacons and a flare path; and he even went so far as to take the side of the Moors, receiving the assassins of Gourp and Erable. This situation, requiring the utmost tact and delicacy, Saint-Exupéry was now called upon to handle at the age of twenty-seven.

Conditions at Juby were harsh in the extreme. A handful of men were living in a remote, isolated, god-forsaken spot bounded on the north, east and south by the great wastes of the Sahara, while to the west stretched the vast empty expanse of the Atlantic. The nearest town or café was eight hundred

miles to the north and fifteen hundred to the south. There was another similar station at Villa Cisneros but even this place was nearly five hundred miles away and, like Juby, in the midst of unsubdued territory. 'We are as much strangers to one another as the planets of the solar system,' wrote Saint-Exupéry.

The place consisted of a Spanish fort, used partly as a guard-post and partly as a penal settlement, where the Spanish governor and his soldiers lived. Apart from this there was a wooden hut, a hangar and a landing-strip. A few months before two soldiers had been captured in the precincts of the fort, and the Spaniards always went about heavily armed in case of further attacks; and not even the officials of the Company were allowed to venture more than a kilometre outside the stockade. Over the enclosure and the massive fortress, with its thick walls, iron-barred windows and cloistered inmates there brooded, Saint-Exupéry wrote, 'an indefinable atmosphere of dread and hostility.'

Here he was to spend eighteen months, occupying the wooden hut with four French mechanics (one of them rather an amusing drunkard with the nickname of Toto) and ten of the Company's Arab employees. Living arrangements were primitive. In his room there was only a camp-bed too small for his large frame, a cracked china wash-basin and a jug of water; the water, which was brought from the Canary Islands, had a brackish flavour. At night he would lie awake listening to the sound of the sea pounding on the beach or to the lonely cries of the sentries stationed round the fort as they called to one another every quarter of an hour.

But in his relations with the Governor Saint-Exupéry showed that he had a capacity not only to get on with all types of men but could be, if necessary, both tactful and wily. His first step was to invite the Governor for a visit to French Morocco, but 'I began only by bringing up the question of a hunting expedition . . . one needs a great deal of patience and diplomacy.' The idea, no doubt, was to show the Spaniards how the French handled the dissident tribes in their own areas. There is no

record of the outcome of this visit, but not long after the Governor sent in a report to Madrid which eased Franco-Spanish tensions in North Africa.

Gradually relations between the two men became cordial. Saint-Exupéry had determined to win over the Governor by treating him, not as an official, but as a human being; it was not long before he discovered that Colonel de la Pena was not an obstinate bureaucrat, as he had been led to believe, but an ordinary Spanish Army officer carrying out, on orders from his superiors in Madrid, the highly uncongenial task of obstructing in every possible way the Company's work at Juby.

Their friendship was cemented by a critical incident. A Spanish flying officer, Captain Martinez, was captured by the Ait Gout tribe on the coast twelve kilometres from Juby. By this time Saint-Exupéry had come to know friendly Arabs who could be trusted to act as intermediaries in negotiating the ransoms of French airmen, and de la Pena asked him to help in Martinez' rescue. He agreed at once to the Governor's request, and landed a number of times in hostile territory, to drop off these Arabs. In the end they were successful in securing Martinez' release.

Saint-Exupéry also made friends with the pilots of the *Escuadrilla Sahariana* (as the Spanish Air Squadron serving the fort was romantically called), and he would invite them to convivial evenings in the hut. Into the monotonous solitary lives of the men around him—whether they were mechanics, Spanish officers or French pilots—he brought fun, gaiety and the zest of his original inventive mind. Like a child he had the gift of establishing immediate vital contact with his fellow-beings. This personal triumph in his relationship with the Spaniards was probably the first of the many experiences which were later to confirm his belief that deep in men's hearts there lies a common humanity only to be found, perhaps, when some profound mutual experience in danger or isolation breaks

through the divisions of interest, class, race, religious faith or political creed.

Juby had a wretched climate. Scorched days were followed by breathless, humid nights; and at dawn and dusk a mist, rising up from the sand, would hang like a damp white pall over the desert, trickling its moisture on to the tin roofs of the barracks. This humidity seeped insidiously into the engines and fabric of the aircraft, and one of Saint-Exupéry's tasks was to flight-test these planes each day.

He would fly for hours and hours across the desert, sometimes taking a Moor with him, but more often than not his only companion the shadow of his aircraft chasing him along the ground in the sunlight. He flew over fissured plateaus, over dried-up stony wadis, over the great waves of rippling sand-dunes; and venturing far to the east he would come upon clusters of mud shacks, situated near desert springs which marked the site of former holy places—'unknown to geographers' as he characteristically remarks, 'but venerated by Moslems.'

Once he landed on a plateau where he was certain that no man had ever set foot before. The surface of this plateau was strewn with minute white shells, but amongst them he discovered black stones as large as a man's fist which, he felt sure, were meteorites. He would return to Juby in the evening when the sun, slanting through the sand-filled air, turned the desert to a scarlet lake.

His only distraction apart from these flights was the arrival of the mail plane once a week; it was Juby's sole link with the outside world. The airmen would sit up with their visitor till late into the night, eager to hear the news and the latest gossip of the Line. When conversation ran out they played the gramophone, an instrument which wheezed, spluttered and needed constant re-winding. Next morning Saint-Exupéry would rise early to see the pilot off, feeling, as his plane disappeared over

the horizon into hostile territory, 'as anxious as an old hen that sees the duckling she has hatched out trying to clear a pond.'

These visitors to Juby were struck by Saint-Exupéry's unconventional appearance and dress; he had become almost indistinguishable from the Moors. His brown eyes—'night-hawk eyes,' as a friend described them—peered out from a face burnt black by the desert sun, and he had also grown a thick beard. Normally, he wore an old dressing-gown not unlike an Arab burnous, and he had even adopted the slow, placed, unhurried gait of the Bedouin.

Indifferent to his own safety, he would roam for miles in the desert, venturing far beyond the stockade, much to the Governor's anxiety; and he took no precautions to protect himself in the barrack-hut. But, curiously enough, the frail wooden structure was never grazed by gunfire whereas de la Pena's stronghold was pock-marked with bullet holes. As Daurat said later with a touch of fantasy: 'Locks and bolts did not interest him much since the magic of his own personality was enough to protect him.'

The defiance of the Moors won him their respect, and he gradually acquired amongst them the authority of an old tribal chief. They would come to him with their many problems, ask for his advice on their tribal disputes, on the diseases of their flocks, on the marriage prices to be asked for their daughters. And many years later when he passed through Juby, a party of blue-veiled Moors rushed forward to welcome him, kissing his hand; they had been waiting for several hours on the airfield to greet him. After such a long absence it was a remarkable tribute to the spell of his personality.

But, fond as he grew of the desert and its ways, there were times when, in the isolation of Juby, he felt he was wasting the best years of youth. 'Many a night have I savoured this taste of the irreparable, wandering in a circle round the fort, our prison, under the burden of the trade-winds. Sometimes, worn out by a day of flight, drenched in the humidity of the tropical

climate I have felt my heart beat in me like the wheels of an express train. . . . Time was running through my fingers like the fine sand of the dunes. . . . Ah, those fevers at night after a day of work in the silence! We seemed to be burning up, like flares set out in the solitude.¹

One June day, when he had been eight months at Juby, a Mahommedan arrived with the news that the carefree Marcel Reine and a fellow-pilot, Serre, had been taken prisoner by the R' Guibat—the tribe responsible for the murder of Gourp and Erable. They had crashed while making the first night-crossing of the desert, and the Mahommedan, who was flying with them as interpreter, had been released to bring the news to Juby—and to demand the extravagant ransom of a million guns, a million sheep, and a million duros.² The sum was eventually reduced to a reasonable figure but the negotiations took a hundred and seventeen days. Meanwhile, though Serre was well treated because the wife of one of the sheiks took a fancy to him, Reine, when they found him, was emaciated, verminous and suffering from the effects of torture.

Saint-Exupéry had made desperate efforts to rescue the two unfortunate men. He once landed in the area a Moor, El Bark, who was on good terms with the chief of the R' Guibat, and he arranged to pick him up five days later at a prearranged spot. El Bark was to signal his presence by letting off smoke-bombs. But the Moor, mistaking another plane for Saint-Exupéry's, ignited the bombs prematurely, and Saint-Exupéry was unable to find him.

In a letter to André Gide, quoted in Gide's admirable introduction to *Night Flight*, Saint-Exupéry described another

¹ *Wind Sand and Stars*.

² *Note:* A duro was five pesetas. These ransoms sometimes had a ludicrous side. A Moorish tribe once captured a German in whose wallet they found a photograph depicting him in the uniform of a German Imperial Guard, and assuming he was the Emperor of Germany they demanded an exorbitant ransom from the Spaniards. When it was refused they hawked the unfortunate man from tribe to tribe as the Emperor, till the Spaniards eventually bought him back for six hundred pesetas. He turned out to be a deserter from the Foreign Legion.

expedition, this time to recover a crashed plane. 'I don't know when I shall be back; I have had so much to do for several months, searching for lost airmen, salvage of planes that have come down in hostile territory, and some flights with the Dakar mail. I have just pulled off a little exploit; spent two days and nights with eleven Moors and a mechanic, recovering a plane. Alarums and excursions, varied and impressive. I heard bullets whizzing over my head for the first time.'

When the party was fired upon, the Moors fled at first in panic. But Saint-Exupéry managed to rally them. 'And now I know,' he continued to Gide, 'how I behave under such conditions—much more calmly than the Moors. I also came to understand something which had always puzzled me—why Plato (Aristotle?) places courage in the last degree of virtues. It's a concoction of feelings that are not so very admirable. A touch of anger, a spice of vanity, a lot of obstinacy and a tawdry "sporting" thrill. Above all, a stimulation of one's physical energies which, however, is oddly out of place. One just folds one's arms, taking deep breaths, across one's open shirt. Rather a pleasant feeling. When it happens at night another feeling creeps into it—of having done something immensely silly. I shall never again admire a merely brave man.' Although he lived in almost continuous danger throughout his life Saint-Exupéry was never much preoccupied by the problem of courage. He took it as a matter of course, being probably one of those rare human beings who are naturally brave.

Many years afterwards in *Letter to a Hostage* Saint-Exupéry recalled these experiences of rescuing airmen forced down in the Sahara. After scouring the desert for days they would suddenly spot a black heap of wreckage in the sand, and landing as close as possible to it, rush forward, flourishing water bottles. 'Every pilot,' he wrote, 'who has flown to the rescue of a comrade in distress knows that all joys are vain in comparison with this one.'

While at Juby Saint-Exupéry went out of his way to make friends with the native population and study their customs. He began by learning the language. 'The marabout comes every day to give me lessons in Arabic,' he wrote in one of his letters, 'and already I am making some progress. I give fashionable tea parties for the Moorish chiefs. And they in turn invite me to take tea in their tents situated two kilometres away in unsubdued territory where no Spaniard has yet ventured. And I will go even further out. There is no risk because they are beginning to know me.' And, rather touchingly, he adds: 'And every day I give chocolate to a gang of charming roguish little Arab boys. I am popular with these brats of the desert. And then there are little wispy girls who look like Hindu princesses with their grown-up airs and graces. I am not without friends.' For a man who longed for unity, for the all-embracing formula, who emphasised human likenesses rather than human differences, it was satisfying to establish these bonds of fellowship with an alien race.

But Saint-Exupéry had no illusions about the character of the Moors. He recognized that they were both fickle and violent. 'The Moors admire force above everything else,' he wrote in an interesting report on conditions at Juby; 'and no argument prevails with them unless it is backed up by force or the threat of force. . . . Notions of gratitude or trust have little more than a vague meaning for them.' But he adds this is largely due to the insecurity of their lives. 'It would be as absurd to depend on the word of the Moors as it would be to reproach them for their untrustworthiness. The sentiment of loyalty—in the European sense of the word—is the result of certain conditions of life in which a man's needs and relationships are stable. But such and such a nomad tribe which feels one need today does not feel the same need tomorrow.' He tried to tame many of the wild Moors who, emerging mysteriously from the silence of the sands, would come up to the stockade in the hope of buying coffee, sugar and tea. But he did so with a practical

aim too, for he hoped thereby to establish little nuclei of friendships in the desert so that airmen forced down would find themselves in relatively safe hands.

The Moorish practice of slavery appalled him. When he visited the tents of the chiefs he was waited upon by these wretched creatures who aroused in him a compassion which stabbed at the heart. Mostly Moroccans of black or mixed blood, they were enticed into the Rio de Oro by traffickers who promised them work and high wages, but, once there, they were sold into slavery for the price of from four to seven camels. Most of them, Saint-Exupéry found, were resigned to their lot. They performed their duties—brewing tea, watering camels, cooking for their masters—with an ox-like resignation; and they appeared to have forgotten altogether their days of freedom. When they grew too old for work they were set free, and then they vainly offered their services from tent to tent till, weak with hunger, they would at last lie down to die in the sand. No one then paid any further heed to them, apart from children who would rush out each morning to see if their limbs still moved.

Saint-Exupéry made touching efforts to free one of these slaves whose name was Bark. Bark, who had been a Moroccan drover, cooked for the French airmen at Juby, and every month his owners would turn up in the barracks to demand his price. Bark was an exceptional slave; he was painfully conscious of his humiliating servitude, still hankered for the joys of family life and, remembering the independent life he once led as a shepherd, would often break down in tears. Time after time he beseeched Saint-Exupéry to hide him in the plane for Marrakesch, but, knowing it would infuriate his owners, he refused to take the risk.

In the end he could not resist the appeal of a man demanding his rights, dignity and self-respect, and he determined to ransom him. There ensued months of negotiation during which Bark's physique and capabilities were gone over point by point and,

of course, his masters assessed them at an extravagant figure. Saint-Exupéry then hit upon the idea of bribing two rascals to swear that Bark was such a sick man that he might die at any moment. This ruse brought a reasonable offer. Bark was handed over, and as the Marrakesch plane was not due for six days, he was locked up in a hut to prevent him being kidnapped.

The most poignant part of the story lies, perhaps, in the efforts of the four French mechanics to scrape together enough money between them to give Bark a new start in life. He set off for Marrakesch with a thousand francs, but went straight to the Kasbah—the prostitutes' quarter—where he 'blew' it recklessly. But at least he was enjoying the rights of a free man.

Greatly as Saint-Exupéry deplored the cruelty of the Moors, there was much in their character and way of life which attracted him. He recognised that the desert had bred in them a pride and independence of spirit, a lordly indifference to civilised comforts and amenities; and he also admired their devotion to this wilderness and their determination to defend it against intruding foreigners. 'I have always and everywhere seen men attach themselves more stubbornly to barren lands than to any other,' he remarked.

Fourteen years later when France was suffering all the agony of the German occupation he wrote *Letter to a Hostage*; and in this short book, in which he tried to revive the hopes of his fellow-countrymen, he recalled the years he spent in the Sahara. Surely they were a proof that although circumstances are sometimes beyond the control of man he is not wholly at their mercy. 'As the desert offers no tangible riches, as there is naught to see or hear in the desert, one is forced to admit, since one's inner life far from being lulled into insensibility there grows stronger, that man is animated primarily by invisible promptings. Man is governed by the spirit. In the desert I am worth as much as my gods.'

CHAPTER V

ART VERSUS ACTION

In November, 1928, Saint-Exupéry learned that he was to be recalled to France. His departure from Juby was delayed because his successor, the pilot Vidal, ran into fog on the flight out, crashed and was taken by the Moors. Saint-Exupéry did not reach home till the early spring of 1929.

His work of patient reconciliation at Juby amongst the Spaniards and Moors had earned him the Legion of Honour. 'By his zeal' (so runs part of the citation), 'his devotion, and his noble disinterestedness, combined with his readiness to face all the hardships of the desert and to expose his life every day to danger, M. de Saint-Exupéry has finely served the cause of French aeronautics; and he has helped to give our commercial aviation its wings, particularly through his part in the development of the Toulouse-Casablanca-Dakar route.' Like Daurat, Mermoz, Reine, the murdered airmen, Gourp and Erable, and other heroes of the Line, he was also honoured by having a part of the North African coast named after him. A bay along this coast is now called the Baie Saint-Exupéry.

After his return from Juby Saint-Exupéry was given several months' leave. He went first to stay with his sister at Agay, where after the aridity of the desert he revelled in all the flamboyant vegetation of the south of France. Then he went on to Paris, carrying with him the manuscript of his first novel, *Courrier Sud*, which he had been working at during the last months at Juby, 'whenever evening fulfilled the promise of a cool breeze that would bathe the limbs and wash away the sweat.'

The novel had not been written without a struggle. At the

beginning of his literary career he found it intensely difficult to translate inner emotional experience into objective narrative. 'I have begun a novel,' he had reported from Juby to a friend. 'You are going to be amused. I've already done a hundred pages, but am doubtful about them. I'm always running up against the abstract in myself. I have an appalling tendency towards the abstract. It comes perhaps from my eternal loneliness . . .'

Although he acquired greater facility with practice, writing never at any time came easily to him. Being a subjective and lyrical writer, he was largely dependent on his moods of inspiration, and these, in turn, were subject to his highly variable states of mind. There were moments of exaltation when his pen would rush over the paper, hardly able to keep pace with the flow of thoughts and images; but they would be followed by hours of inertia and depression when the right word or phrase would come only after long trial and error. Then he would seek feverishly for a particular pen he had written so well with a few days before, or for the orange paper which might help him to 'unwind'; he would also drink cup after cup of very strong tea. This search for an artificial stimulus, which later became more and more evident in his life, shows also in his literary style with its tendency to exaggeration, flamboyance and a kind of rhapsodic overstatement.

He seems to have concentrated best when there was a buzz of life and movement around him. Many of his books were written in cafés, his favourite in Paris being the Deux Magots in Saint-Germain des Prés; he continued the same habit even in New York during the war; and on his return to Algiers one of the first questions he asked his friend Dr. Georges Péliissier, with whom he was staying, was which were the best cafés in the town to write in.

There is a story told of him in New York which shows his literary perfectionism. He once asked a well-known American woman novelist to read one of his manuscripts, but when she

opened the bulky packet she found to her surprise that it contained nearly a hundred versions of the same page, and he was sincerely seeking her advice as to which of these versions was the best.

Another favourite habit was to read his manuscripts aloud to his friends and then press them impatiently for an opinion. What he wanted from these friends was not analytical criticism but emotional response. 'I want you to talk to me of my work without interposing your judgment.' Such sessions must have been trying, for if his friends' responses did not satisfy him he would listen to their comments with a bad grace, or become cantankerous and argumentative.

While he was writing, the only books he kept on his table were popular scientific works, like those of Broglie and Jeans and Eddington—books which did not disturb his inner imaginative world and yet stimulated his sense of the wonders of the universe. Even at other times he was never a great reader. Pélissier was surprised to find on visits to his various homes that his library consisted only of a few volumes, mainly the philosophical works of Pascal, Descartes and Nietzsche, and the poetry of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Villon. He had a great admiration for Rimbaud, and at one moment even planned to write a biography of him. It might have been a remarkable work, since he was particularly qualified to understand Rimbaud's conflict between art and action.

We have already given an account of the episode in Saint-Exupéry's life which suggested the theme of *Courrier Sud*: that of a young man struggling to wean himself from adolescent romanticism in order to face up to the realities of life. The hero, Jacques Bernis, is an airline pilot torn between the claims of his new and exacting profession, which demands single-hearted allegiance, and his idealised love for a girl, Geneviève, a sweetheart of his boyhood. The couple elope together, but Bernis soon discovers that she is only an egotistic, insipid girl who

would jeopardise her lover's career in her need for a home and security; thus he manages to break away from her spell.

Having learnt his lesson, he returns with both joy and relief to his flying career, in which he finally loses his life. The book ends: 'Pilot killed: aircraft damaged: mail intact.' But the author implies that Bernis' death has not been in vain; he has carried out his duty to the last, and it was in the performance of that duty that he had won back his manhood, freedom and independence.

Courrier Sud is not a good novel. The theme, though interesting, is handled in an immature way; the plot is artificially constructed and not very credible; and neither Bernis nor Geneviève are very convincing as characters: Bernis because he too often irritates us by his boyish, woolly idealism, Geneviève because she is only a projection of this idealism and its subsequent disillusion.

On the other hand, *Courrier Sud* does present a moving picture of an adolescent's problems before he finds his path in life. Thus, on leave in Paris, Bernis, unhappy, tormented in mind, wanders one day into Nôtre-Dame in a vague search for help. There he listens to a sermon, but, though delivered with eloquence and rhetorical fervour, it strikes him as hollow and empty, as though the priest were trying to whip himself up into a state of mind in which he could accept his own gospel. 'Bernis thought: "What despair! Where is the act of faith? I have not heard the act of faith but a cry of utter despair."' '

When Bernis tries to find relief in sex, he is equally disillusioned; he goes to a cabaret where he picks up a young dancer, but afterwards has to admit ruefully to himself that she could give him nothing. 'And yet,' comments Saint-Exupéry, 'his loneliness was so cruel that he needed her.'

These adolescent yearnings seem particularly intense to the young pilot on leave who is thrilled by his discovery of the new dimension of the air. From Paris he writes to a friend, an air-line pilot like himself: 'Tangiers, that little town of no

account or consequence—it was my first conquest. The landing: the blossoming-out of meadows, flowers, houses. And then suddenly that marvellous discovery at fifteen hundred feet from the ground: the Arab labourer whom I was drawing towards me, whom I was making grow to my own size. . . . Two minutes later, with my feet on the ground, I felt reborn, as though I had landed on a star where life begins afresh. I felt myself part of that earth, that sky, like a young tree. And I stretched myself, hungry, striding along, relaxing my limbs after the strain of the flight; and I laughed to think that I had rejoined my shadow on the ground. . . . And then, you remember, that haste to go on again, to search for something still further beyond. . . . For I was like a water-diviner whose hazel-stick trembles as he marches over the earth until he finds the spring.’

He goes on with the same romantic thirst: ‘Tell me what I’m searching for, and why as I lean from my window over this town full of friends, memories and desires, am I in despair? Why can’t I find the source and do I feel so far from the treasure? What is this hidden promise which one feels has been made but which a hidden God has not kept?’

The novel, incidentally, contains many vivid descriptions of flying: ‘Abreast of Gibraltar it will be night. A turn to the left towards Tangiers—and Bernis will cut loose from Europe, immense ice-floe, adrift. . . . Again a few towns nourished by the brown soil. Then Africa. Then again a few towns nourished by the black clay. Then the Sahara. Bernis will be present tonight as the earth by degrees strips itself bare . . .’

The chief interest of *Courrier Sud* today is, perhaps, the light it throws on Saint-Exupéry’s state of mind as a young man. Most sensitive youths go through similar struggles before they renounce all those haunting, yet unrequited, dreams and illusions. But from this novel it is clear how exceptionally hard it was for a man of Saint-Exupéry’s temperament to distinguish between the real and the illusory, and how much the Line must have helped him by its hard, extravert discipline. Didier

Daurat, with his keen insight into human nature, made this last point when we met him at Orly. 'Look at the difference between *Courrier Sud* and his later novel *Night Flight*,' he exclaimed. '*Courrier Sud* is the work of an adolescent, but *Night Flight* is a masterpiece, a work of maturity. I think we can claim that the Line helped Saint-Exupéry to reach this maturity more quickly than he could possibly have done in any other way.'

Saint-Exupéry soon found a publisher in the well-known firm of Gallimard, which not only took the novel, but offered him a contract for his next seven books. Later on, Gaston Gallimard and Saint-Exupéry became close personal friends. *Courrier Sud* caused little stir though André Gide was one of the few to recognise its merits, realising that the author possessed not only literary talent, but the deeper drives and compulsions of the real artist; and, no doubt, the lyrical passages about the air in *Courrier Sud* made a particular appeal to the author of *Nourritures Terrestres*. Gide later became a literary godfather to the younger writer, contributing a preface to *Night Flight* and suggesting the form that Saint-Exupéry should adopt for the later *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

Through his cousin, Mme. de l'Estrange, Saint-Exupéry was now introduced to the literary circles of Paris, and he met one or two people who were to be lifelong friends. Among them was a charming and intelligent woman well known in the literary and social life of the capital. 'At our first meeting,' she told us, 'he handed me a copy of *Courrier Sud*, and as I read it he stood like a bashful schoolboy, waiting with apprehension for my opinion of it. And then, as we began to discuss the book together, he grew tense and excited; he was always carried away by ideas. Antoine's enthusiasm was tremendous, and compared with him, the youth of today seems almost apathetic towards life.'

She then went on to tell us what an influence he had exercised

on her during the many years of their friendship. She admired, above all, his moral integrity and the extreme delicacy of his mind. 'I have often thought of Antoine since his death,' she said. 'When I have a difficult decision to make I always ask myself what *he* would have done in similar circumstances. Then I am sure of finding the right answer.'

The literary coteries did not greatly appeal to him. Apart from one or two friends, like André Gide, he tended to shun the company of literary men, particularly the professional writers—'les gens du métier,' as he called them. He once expressed the view that the writer, the artist, was by nature a spectator of, rather than a participant in, the human scene and consequently evaded his responsibilities towards life which, in turn, stultified his development as a human being. The idea of making literature a whole-time career horrified him: 'It's an invitation to be nothing at all; it is only in the acceptance of obligation that one becomes somebody.'

His mistrust of the professional writer extended to the 'intellectual,' in whom mere wit and verbal brilliance too often took the place of warmth, sympathy and human understanding. And this 'cleverness' he saw as one of the besetting sins of his fellow-countrymen. 'We in France almost died of intelligence unsupported by substance,' he wrote after his country's defeat in the Second World War.

He insisted that, no matter how sincere it might be, the view of the 'intellectual' must be limited since it repudiates the emotions. 'We too often make the mistake,' he wrote, 'of confusing the moral quality of men with that which a good education has nonetheless succeeded in drawing out of them . . .' The 'intellectual' lacked a heart and a soul. 'And what,' he asked, 'is a man if he lacks substance, if he is not a *human being*, but simply a point of view?'

Leaves are apt to prove disappointing, particularly for a man who has been leading a full and adventurous life, and Saint-

Exupéry learnt with relief that he was shortly to be sent to South America. Before setting off he attended in the summer of 1929 a navigation course at Brest run by the French Navy. Intended for the élite pilots of the French Air Force and civil aviation, it was in charge of a brilliant young naval lieutenant, L. M. Chassin, later to be a well-known Air Force General. Chassin and Saint-Exupéry became devoted friends, and many years afterwards Saint-Exupéry had reason to be grateful for Chassin's help at a critical hour.

At Brest Saint-Exupéry gained a diploma, which helped him some years after to obtain a job as a test pilot, but the diploma, according to Chassin, was scarcely merited. He handled the delicate instruments with his usual clumsiness, smashing a magnetic compass, breaking up a hydrographic instrument and nearly causing the loss of an exceptionally valuable piece of mechanism for measuring drift. He had taken off in a hydroplane, but had forgotten to close the hatches, and as he touched down, water poured into the hull, nearly washing the precious gadget overboard. Chassin says, however, that only Saint-Exupéry's skill as a pilot prevented the loss of the hydroplane as well as the instrument and adds, 'As a punishment I confined myself to treating Antoine with coldness and reserve; it was a torment to him.'

This period at Brest was the beginning of Saint-Exupéry's scientific interests, and Chassin writes with real admiration of his abilities in this direction. Saint-Exupéry possessed, he says, 'an almost physical awareness of the great mathematical splendours,' and he believes that had he devoted himself exclusively to mathematics he would have made a great contribution in that field—a judgment confirmed, incidentally, at the end of Saint-Exupéry's life by a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Algiers. At different periods of his life he amazed other experts in varying branches of science such as the biologist Molveck, the astronomer Mineur and the expert in aerodynamics, Von Karman, by his imaginative grasp of their

subjects. As a thinker he had the art not only of being able to simplify the most complex of problems, but also of quickly discovering new and unexpected relationships between different orders of ideas. This, too, gave a stimulating range and fluidity to his conversation.

He also showed a considerable gift for practical invention. Between 1934 and 1939 alone he took out eight patents for various aeronautical instruments which ranged from navigational aids to a new system for starting aircraft engines; and in Corsica, a few weeks before his death, he invented and produced a new type of water-distiller. The first of these patents, a blind-landing device, was taken out in 1934; but, typically, he forgot to renew it, and he only learnt that it had been put into production when one day a firm of manufacturers sent him a cheque. Most of these inventions have since been absorbed by subsequent developments, particularly during the War. But in the opinion of Professor Metral of the Conservatoire des Art et Sciences they represent a remarkable achievement for an amateur. 'He worked on difficult problems without the help of laboratories,' wrote the Professor, 'at a period when eminent technicians and even experts were only beginning on the same studies; and yet he found solutions and proposed concrete methods for carrying them out.'

His developing scientific interests, which included aerodynamics, astronomy, biology, mathematics and relativity, and later jet-propulsion and nuclear physics, became linked as time went on to his search for a synthesis which would embrace all the activities and even aspirations of man, both scientific and spiritual. His more fervent admirers even believed that he would have been capable of doing for the modern world what Saint Thomas did for the mediæval. This, clearly, is an overstatement. But the very fact that he saw a need for such a synthesis shows the measure of his vision.

Chassin gives a charming account of the evenings he and Saint-Exupéry spent together at Brest. Their usual meeting-place was

the well-known Brasserie de la Marine, where Saint-Exupéry would talk about his scientific ideas with passion, interrupting himself to jot down a formula on the marble-topped table, while at the same time fashioning with his fingers all kinds of little paper objects—a sailing vessel, a new type of hydroplane, or something that looked like a cornucopia.

Another favourite amusement was watching the stars at night. As a pilot he had learned their fascinating names, their different orders of brilliance and how, when lost in the air, he could get a bearing or fix his position by them. In most of his books there are references to the stars: in one of them he spoke of their 'mysterious and unwearied light.' Now on clear nights at Brest he and Chassin would climb together up the hill past the old Castle, from where they would 'shoot' the stars with their sextants.

At the beginning of September, 1929, Saint-Exupéry embarked at Bordeaux on his way to South America.

CHAPTER VI

THREE HEROES IN SOUTH AMERICA

I. SAINT-EXUPÉRY AND THE CYCLONE

Ever since the beginnings of the Line after the First World War its founders had been obsessed by the dream of linking France by air with Buenos Aires, and then creating a network of air services all over South America. Despite the difficulties—the financial handicaps, the obsolete aircraft, the disputes with the Spaniards, the perils of the desert crossing, the heavy loss of life amongst the crews—this dream was slowly coming true. The crossing of the Atlantic was yet only a distant prospect, but as early as 1924 Latécoère and Daurat had sailed to Rio de Janeiro to open negotiations with the various South American countries. Taking their aircraft with them in the hold of the ship, they flew from Rio de Janeiro to Buenos Aires in a demonstration flight. It was the second flight ever to be made between the two cities. They were coldly received by the Argentine Commandant of the airport, and he fought a duel with an Argentine pilot, who, having served in the French Air Force in the war, was friendly to the visitors.

Despite this incident arrangements were satisfactorily concluded between the Company and the Argentine and Brazilian Governments. An air-line was soon operating between Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, and by the end of 1927 it had been extended to Natal. This was a dangerous undertaking since at the time there were no airfields along the route, and pilots had to land on the beaches. But this part of the service was important to the Line as it was hoped eventually to

link Natal with Dakar—the shortest ‘hop’ across the South Atlantic.

In the meantime M. Latécoère had fallen into difficulties. He had spent millions of francs on the development of the Company, and now lacked the necessary capital to finance its operation in South America. When he applied to the French Government for an additional subsidy they refused to grant it unless Latécoère would agree to surrender the management to their own nominees if and when the Government called upon him to do so; and the enterprising industrialist, who had given so many years of his life to the creation of the individual spirit and character of the Line, was loth to see it fall under Government control.

Latécoère decided to sell out to M. Bouilloux-Lafont, a multi-millionaire, with huge business concerns throughout the whole of South America. Bouilloux-Lafont appears to have owned dockyards, railways, banking-houses and entire districts of towns; and this man, who had found his ‘romance’ in big business, realised the advantages which would accrue to his vast enterprises if rapid communication by air could be established between Europe and his ‘dominions.’ On buying out Latécoère he changed the name of the Company to Aéropostale. His next step was to place a young but experienced French technician, Julien Pranville, in charge of the Company’s interests in South America; and Pranville, on Daurat’s recommendation, appointed Mermoz as his chief pilot.

On the quay waiting to greet Saint-Exupéry when he disembarked at Buenos Aires on the twelfth of October, 1929, were Mermoz, Guillaumet, Marcel Reine and a number of the other pilots. For the airmen of the Line these reunions had become poignant occasions, since they were now dispersed over half the globe from Paris to Santiago.

Saint-Exupéry was not impressed by the Argentine capital, which he found ugly, soulless, and with its monotonous uni-

formity of design, without either charm or character. 'It's a dreary, mournful place,' he wrote. 'The streets are narrow, the people sad, and there is no place to walk. . . . The architects have put their genius into suppressing every perspective.' But he was overwhelmed by the beauty of the great town when he saw it lit up at night from the air. Coming in with the night-plane from Santiago or Santa Cruz he would throttle back his engine and then, in the stillness, float down over a great sea of multi-coloured lights, as though in suspended animation between two worlds. According to Doctor Pélissier, Saint-Exupéry had been far more impressed flying over Buenos Aires at night even than when flying amongst the great peaks of the Andes. The Cordilleras had disappointed him—it may have been because seen from an altitude mountains lose something of their grandeur—but Buenos Aires from the air was, he told Pélissier, 'a prodigious sight.' It was laid out 'like a draughtboard, with its narrow streets, all brilliantly lit up, intersecting at right angles the great blocks of buildings. From the air the juxtaposition of all these brilliant points of light gives the impression of a cloth of gold.'

It was probably the dazzling, chequer-board lighting of Buenos Aires which in the Second World War gave him the idea of carrying out experiments in luminous camouflage for the protection of towns and installations from night-bomber attack.

For a week or more after his arrival Saint-Exupéry had no notion what his job was going to be; orders were to follow later from Toulouse. Every day he grew more and more impatient, fearing that he would be grounded in an administrative post. But the anxiety was needless. He learned finally that he had been appointed Managing Director of 'Aeroposta Argentina,' the Company's Argentine branch. Although only twenty-nine years old, he had been given an important executive job which would call for all the qualities of tact and diplomacy he had shown at Juby; for he had to deal with

touchy Argentine officials, and many of them resented the presence in their country of a French-owned airline. But there would also be plenty of opportunities for flying; both on inspection flights to the Company's various outposts and in opening up one of the most difficult and dangerous air routes in South America—the Southern Patagonia route. Now he was no longer afraid of being left out of things.

When he took over the Argentine service the Line was only operating southwards from Buenos Aires as far as Comodoro-Rivadavia, a Patagonian town approximately half-way between Buenos Aires and Tierra del Fuego. It was now his task to extend it, prospecting the country, planning air routes, and establishing landing-places, right down the east coast, and over the Straits of Magellan, to Punta Arenas, the most southerly town in the world. It was an extraordinarily exciting, adventurous undertaking since it meant flying over a strange and inhospitable land; a land of violence and fury, barren, rocky, primeval, antagonistic to man and indeed to life itself; a land swept by storms and hurricanes which, blasting their way through gaps in the Cordilleras, annihilated flocks, blew the roofs off houses and overturned vehicles on the roads.¹

Particularly impressive was the country over which a pilot flew as he neared the Magellan Straits. 'He looks down,' wrote Saint-Exupéry, 'upon an ancient lava flow, an erupted waste of thickness of sixty feet that crushes down the plain on which it has congealed. Farther south he meets a second flow, then a third; and thereafter every hump on the globe, every mound a few hundred feet high, carries a crater in its flank. No Vesuvius rises up to reign in the clouds; merely, flat on the plain, a succession of gaping, howitzer mouths. There is something surprising in the tranquillity of this deserted landscape where once a thousand volcanoes boomed to each other in their great

¹ According to J. G. Fleury (*La Ligne*) it was known as the 'country of the flying stones'; and the few roads which intersected it were scored with shallow 'gutters' to prevent motorists travelling at more than eighteen to twenty miles an hour owing to the danger, at high speeds, of the wind-whirled rocks and stones.

subterranean organs and spat forth their fire. I fly over a world mute and abandoned, strewn with black glaciers . . .¹

Saint-Exupéry adds that the airman, as he crosses this savage region, is suddenly reminded of the relatively small proportion of his planet man has been able to subdue. He realises that, far from being masters of it, we are only invading strangers moving precariously over its crust. Yet how curiously satisfying to him is this panoramic glimpse of the earth. For the first time he sees it not, agonizingly, in profile, but full face; not merely does he see the segment of a mountain, but the mountain itself, its shape, its size, its contours; not merely this or that reach of a river, but its life, its serpentine meanderings, its relationship to other aspects of the landscape—the lakes which it waters, the valleys through which it flows, the mountains which overshadow it; and suddenly seeing the earth thus harmoniously spread out beneath him he acquires a strange passion, a romantic zest, for the topographical picture; it is as though, for a brief, ecstatic moment, part of the universal design had been revealed to him.

Landing in the cool of evening at Punta Arenas, at the southernmost tip of the continent, he wandered amongst the crowds, watching the young girls and the old women coming to draw water from a fountain in the public square; and once again he reflected on the courage of man who has built his great spiritual edifice on such tenuous, insecure foundations. 'Whence,' he asks, 'do men draw this passion for eternity, flung by chance as they are upon a scarcely cooled bed of lava, threatened from the beginning by the deserts that are to be, and under the constant menace of the snows?'

Saint-Exupéry saw all this as another example of the triumph of the human spirit. It scarcely mattered whether it was Didier Daurat, back in Toulouse, forging the spirit of the Line with a handful of ex-war pilots; or Mermoz, somewhere between Rio de Janiero and Natal, landing his aircraft on a wave-swept

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars.*

beach; or the citizens of Punta Arenas who had built their town on a little mud 'between the timeless lava and the austral ice'—it was the same invincible, tenacious, eternally creative urge of man.

For three months of the year the prevailing winds in Patagonia, even at ground level, blew at speeds of up to a hundred miles an hour. But usually these gales were of short duration; the aircraft stood up under the strain of them, and visibility, generally, remained good. 'We who flew the route recognised the winds from afar by a grey-blue tint in the atmosphere, at the sight of which we would tighten our belts and shoulder-straps. From then on we had an hour of stiff fighting, stumbling again and again into invisible ditches of air. . . . Our muscles felt pretty much as if we had been carrying a longshoreman's load.'¹

One day, flying down to Comodoro-Rivadavia, Saint-Exupéry encountered something infinitely worse than a storm. 'On this particular day,' he says, 'I did not like the colour of the sky. It was blue. Pure blue. Too pure. . . . Another thing bothered me. On a level with the mountain peaks I could see not a haze, not a mist, not a sandy fog, but a sort of ash-coloured streamer in the sky. . . . Very soon came a slight tremor. No rolling, no pitching. No swing to speak of. And then everything round me blew up.'

For the next couple of minutes he could no longer follow the sequence of his impressions, but one thing he realised was that his aircraft was not moving forward. 'Having banked to the right in order to correct a sudden drift, I saw the landscape freeze abruptly where it was and remain jiggling on the same spot. I was making no headway. My wings had ceased to nibble into the outline of the earth. I could see the earth buckle, pivot—but it stayed put. The plane was skidding as if on a toothless cogwheel.'

He then sensed that his only hope of escaping the cyclone

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

(which, he later learned, was blowing at a hundred and fifty miles an hour) was to seek shelter near the ground, even if it meant the sacrifice of altitude. He came down into a valley, but only to find himself imprisoned in it, pressed down between its towering hills by the violence of the currents. 'I was in the wings of a theatre cluttered up with bits of scenery. Vertical, oblique, horizontal, all of plane geometry was a whirl. A hundred transversal valleys were muddled in a jumble of perspectives. . . . Scarcely the faintest twinge of fear went through me when one of the walls of my prison rose suddenly like a tidal wave over my head.'

Reaching the other side of the valley, an up-current swept him rapidly upwards without warning, lifted him over the peaks and shot him out to sea. 'I had been spat out to sea by a monstrous cough, vomited out of my valley as from the mouth of a howitzer. The mountain range stood up like a crenellated fortress against the pure sky while the cyclone crushed me down to the surface of the waters. How hard that wind was blowing I found out as soon as I tried to climb: throttle wide open, engines running at my maximum, my plane hanging sixty feet over the water, I was unable to budge . . . I was feeling practically nothing as I stared down at the imprint made by the wind on the sea. I saw a series of great white puddles, each perhaps eight hundred yards in extent. They were running towards me at a speed of one hundred and fifty miles an hour where the down-surge wind-spouts broke against the surface of the sea in a succession of horizontal explosions. The sea was white and it was green—white with the whiteness of crushed sugar and green in pools the colour of emeralds. . . . It seemed hopeless. In twenty minutes of struggle I had not moved forward a hundred yards. What was more, with flying as hard as it was out here five miles from the coast, I wondered how I could possibly buck the winds along the shore, assuming I was able to fight my way in. I was a perfect target for the enemy on shore. Fear, however, was out of the

question. I was incapable of thinking. I was emptied of everything except the vision of a very simple act. I must straighten. Straighten out. Straighten out.'

After an hour and twenty minutes' battle he managed to climb to nine hundred feet. The speed of the cyclone had now begun to slacken off. Then he was able to drift in towards the coastline; but although it was only five miles away it still took him a whole hour to reach it. Eventually, flying in the shelter of a cliff, he arrived at Comodoro-Rivadavia.

But the wind there, even at ground level, was still blowing with terrific force, and he had to fly in with throttle wide open to prevent his aircraft dropping on to the ground in a stall; and when he touched down he had to keep his engine running full out—otherwise the plane would have turned over and smashed its wings. A car and a truck had come out to his aid but a gust of wind overturned them. A platoon of soldiers, standing by, with some gauchos and mechanics, then rushed forward, threw themselves on the wings and the tail-plane, and managed to hold the aircraft down. They dragged it back across the field whilst its wires and struts sang like the strings of a harp. It took them a full hour to haul it into the hangar. Saint-Exupéry climbed out of the cockpit, exhausted, numbed in body and mind. Conscious that he had been through a tremendous ordeal, his first impulse was to tell someone about it.

But he remained silent. For what, after all, he reflected, could one truthfully say about such an experience? Physically, it had been much the most overwhelming event of his life; but, spiritually, it was without significance. In the throes of the cyclone, he had felt no emotion at all, not even the sense of horror. Horror, if you come to think of it, is something invented after the fact when memory tries to recreate the experience; and he did not wish to be accused of lying, of boasting, of pretending to feelings which he had not felt . . .

Now he knew only this unutterable weariness. 'I was sleepy. I kept moving my fingers, but they stayed numb. My shoulders

were aching. My insides felt as if they had been crushed by a terrible weight. But you cannot make drama out of that . . .'

And he walked away from the hangar, nursing his silence.

2. MERMOZ THE PIONEER

It was Jean Mermoz, the Company's chief pilot, who by his skill and bravery did more than anyone else to develop the Line in South America. He is indeed one of the most glamorous and romantic personalities of French aviation, and he had many qualities which Saint-Exupéry regarded as characteristic of the hero.

Born on the 9th of December, 1901, he was a year younger than Saint-Exupéry, and although he sprang from a totally different background—the 'petite bourgeoisie'—his early life, like Saint-Exupéry's, had been a struggle against poverty. His father, a provincial innkeeper, was a brutal man, and Mermoz' first memories were of violent quarrels between his parents, which for the rest of his life made him nervy and quick-tempered. When he was still an infant his mother left her husband, and she had to go out to work to bring up her son. Mermoz never forgot the unhappiness of those early days.

He joined the French Air Force at the age of eighteen, and although subject to fits of depression (once he almost committed suicide) he succeeded in mastering his nervous troubles. After distinguishing himself as an airman in Syria, he returned to France, but quarrelled violently with one of his senior officers about a young girl. He then threw up his Service career.

All his life his mercurial temperament was to involve him in hectic love-affairs. Tall, lithe, with blue eyes and fair hair—the incarnation, according to his biographer, Joseph Kessel, of the 'beau mâle viril'¹—he was irresistible as a lover; and, delighting in panache and swagger, he preened himself on these conquests. Sometimes the spell he cast over women was fatal. Once when

¹ *Mermoz* by Joseph Kessel.

he tried to break off an affair with one of his mistresses, she begged him to spend one last night with her as a final favour. In the middle of the night he suddenly awoke to find a corpse lying beside him; the woman had poisoned herself while he was asleep.

After he left the French Air Force Mermoz searched everywhere for work, earning a few francs as a garage-hand and in other more menial jobs. For a time he was employed by a film company to dive, at considerable risk, an old Sopwith aircraft into the Seine. Kessel relates that when he once asked Mermoz if he were ever afraid in the air he replied: 'In the air I never felt anything like the fear—the black fear—which I knew when I was tramping the streets of Paris. I then realized that I might never fly again—in other words, lead the only life possible to me.'

At the age of twenty-three Mermoz joined the Line. He pioneered the dangerous Casablanca-Dakar route, in the course of which he was captured and tortured for several weeks by the Moors; even so he later made several risky attempts to rescue comrades who had fallen into their hands. After the murder of Erable and Pintado he set out to recover their remains, but only found a few bones and some locks of Erable's hair. The exploit was typical of a certain endearing chivalry in him.

It was while Saint-Exupéry was in the desert at Juby that the two men became such great friends. According to Kessel, Mermoz used to arrive there regularly with the mail plane, electrifying everybody by his vitality and his air of animal well-being. Leaping out of the aircraft he would run down to the sea for a bathe, return to eat a huge meal in the barracks—they used to get in extra rations for him—and then sleep for twelve hours at a stretch.

But Mermoz was by no means the pure extravert, and in *Terre des Hommes* Saint-Exupéry tells a charming story to illustrate his imaginative side. 'One night in Paris Mermoz and

I, with some other friends, set out to celebrate an anniversary, and at daybreak we found ourselves standing on the threshold of a bar. We were fed up; we had talked and drunk too much, and we felt ashamed at having worn ourselves out in this useless fashion. As dawn broke, Mermoz gripped me suddenly by the arm, digging his nails into my flesh. "You know, old chap, at Dakar now . . ."

'At Dakar now the mechanics, rubbing their sleep-laden eyes, will be removing the covers from the propellers, the pilots will be strolling into the "Met" room, and the world will be ringing only with the voices of comrades.

'The sky was already paling. And the waiters were already laying the tables for other customers, preparing for yet another party—a party at which we should not be present. Elsewhere others were risking their lives . . .

"And here," Mermoz concluded, "how sordid it all is!"'

After his exploits in North Africa Mermoz suffered a great disappointment. It was known that two French pilots, Costes and Le Brix, were intending to make a bid for the first crossing of the South Atlantic. M. Latécoère had built a new aircraft, the Laté 26, in which the Company hoped to outdo these competitors. In August 1927, a few months before he left for South America, Mermoz was summoned by Daurat to Toulouse to take charge of the flight. 'For the first time in his life,' writes Kessel, 'Mermoz felt the almost intolerable excitement of a great enterprise, and he also knew he was on the eve of an experience which might make his name memorable.' He set off on the first stage of the flight on the same day as Costes and Le Brix, and reached Saint-Louis-du-Sénégal, on the West African coast, two hours before them. But there misfortune overtook him: he was grounded by propeller trouble. In the meantime his rivals had flown ahead.

In South America Mermoz was first given the job of starting up night services, which later became the subject of Saint-

Exupéry's novel, *Night Flight*. Airfields then still lacked flare-paths, beacons, and indeed any proper lighting facilities. 'Hovering in the pitch-black night,' Saint-Exupéry wrote, 'Mermoz would land by the faint glimmer of three gasoline flares.' On the evening of 16th April, 1928, Mermoz took off in darkness from Rio de Janeiro, flew through the night without a wireless or any weather forecasts and touched down in Buenos Aires the following night. Paris now became only a week's flight from Buenos Aires though, of course, the Atlantic stretch from Dakar to Natal still had to be made by boat.

After many other exploits, during one of which he was forced down amongst Indian tribes in the virgin forests of Paraguay, he set out on perhaps the greatest venture of his life: the crossing of the Andes. His object was to link Buenos Aires with Santiago and the other Chilean cities. 'He who had flung a bridge over the Sahara was now to do the same over the Andes,' in the words of Saint-Exupéry. 'In a plane whose positive ceiling was sixteen thousand feet they asked him to fly over a mountain range that rose more than twenty thousand feet into the air. He who had studied the face of the sands was now to learn the contours of the peaks, those crags whose scarfs of snow flutter restlessly in the winds, whose surfaces are bleached white in the storms, whose blustering gusts sweep through the narrow walls of their rocky corridors and force the pilot to a sort of hand-to-hand combat.'

Many times Mermoz scoured the Cordilleras for the gap, the mountain-pass, which he could slip through, making use of his knowledge of air currents to lift him over high and impassable ranges. On one flight, in which he was accompanied by a mechanic and a passenger, a block in the petrol feed stopped the engine. Mermoz landed on a narrow plateau that sloped down to a precipice. But the machine began to roll on towards the edge; before his passengers were aware of the danger Mermoz jumped out of the aircraft, threw his body under the wheels and stopped it in time.

But on the return flight from Santiago to Buenos Aires, in which only Collenot, the mechanic, was with him, they had to turn back after a desperate adventure. Over the Andes they were suddenly caught in a down-current which swept them from the peaks on to a lower plateau. Mermoz managed to make a successful crash-landing, smashing up the undercarriage and part of the fuselage. The two men then decided to set out on foot to try to reach the nearest village, but found that the plateau was encircled on all sides by steep, impassable gorges. Their only hope now was somehow to fly off the aircraft. They spent the night repairing it by moonlight, and the next morning, as Saint-Exupéry wrote, 'themselves still in it, they sent the plane rolling and bouncing down an incline over the rocky ground until it reached the gorge, went off into air, and dropped. In falling, the plane picked up enough speed to respond to the controls. Mermoz was able to tilt its nose in the direction of a peak, sweep over the peak and, while the water spurted through all the pipes burst by the night frost, the ship already disabled after only seven minutes of flight, he saw before him like a promised land the Chilean plain.'

These feats soon made Mermoz famous all over South America, which gratified his thirst for the limelight. This was a prominent trait in his character, as was remarked by De Massimi, the Managing Director of the Line,¹ who had often seen him in North Africa on his visits of inspection to the Company's outposts. According to De Massimi, Mermoz was haunted by the feats of Lindbergh, Costes and other famous pilots and, envious of their glory, he chafed under the routine and discipline of the Line in which, in the North African days, achievement brought relatively little public recognition.

For the same reason Mermoz and Daurat were not always on good terms. The defects of Mermoz's temperament—the bravado, the vanity, the impulsiveness—angered the man who used to tell his pilots that their characters should be 'as limpid

¹ See *V'ent Debout* by B. de Massimi.

as the element through which they flew.' Daurat's values were essentially those of the ascetic: he preached endeavour for its own sake rather than for reward or glory and, above all, self-discipline—what he called 'empire sur soi-même.' Contrasting the characters of Mermoz and Guillaumet he told us: 'I admired Mermoz' genius as a pilot and his utter devotion to the air. But I loved Guillaumet because he was a man without vanity. That is a rare thing in any human being.'

Some years later Mermoz, like his hero Lindbergh, became embroiled in politics, and he joined the French Fascist organisation, the Croix-de-Feu, led by Colonel de la Rocque, in which he soon became a leading figure. Saint-Exupéry later tried to excuse this action on the ground that Mermoz was a victim of the spiritual hopelessness of his time. 'Could Mermoz ever have followed that ninny of a Colonel if he had not been hungry for faith?'

But Mermoz never gave up his pioneering work in the air. He did much to open up for Air-France both the North and South Atlantic routes, and it was during a flight across the South Atlantic in an Air-France plane, the 'Croix du Sud,' that he lost his life. He was reported missing on the 7th of December, 1936. 'He had done his job and slipped away to rest,' wrote Saint-Exupéry, who was greatly upset by his death. 'He was like a gleaner who, having carefully bound his sheaf, lies down in the field to sleep.' It was a gentle obituary for so flamboyant a character.

Saint-Exupéry saw Mermoz as the prototype of the hero who obeys his deeper instincts. Every man, Saint-Exupéry considered, was a divided being, longing on the one hand for a fuller, richer life in which he could fulfil his hidden aspirations and discover his 'truth,' but afraid, on the other, of losing the security to which he was urged by all the dictates of reason. 'We are afraid to let go of our petty reality in order to grasp at a great shadow.' But the exceptional beings, the heroes, were those who were ready to act on deeper impulses, to respond to

the call of the 'hidden god' within them. 'If, when Mermoz plunged into the Chilean Andes with victory in his heart, you had protested to him that no merchant's letter could possibly have been worth risking one's life for, Mermoz would have laughed in your face. When Mermoz slipped through the Andean passes a new man was born in him—he found the truth in himself.' And Saint-Exupéry quotes admiringly Mermoz's bold words: 'It's worth it—it's worth the final smash-up.'¹

There is a suggestion here of Fascist ideology, and it is true that as a young man Saint-Exupéry's favourite philosopher was Nietzsche, whose influence can be traced in his works, particularly in *The Wisdom of the Sands*: while his admiration for the man who obeys instinct rather than reason comes very near to Bergson's theory of intuitionism and the whole anti-rational movement in European thought, which itself stemmed largely from Nietzsche. Yet he only accepted Nietzsche's philosophy with reservations. Instead of, like Nietzsche, considering the hero as one entitled to trample the weak underfoot, he conceived him as one who moulded others for their own good. An example of this type of man was Didier Daurat, whose creative fervour and energy Saint-Exupéry so much admired.

3. GUILLAUMET AND THE ANDES

Another outstanding quality of the hero, Saint-Exupéry believed, was his sense of responsibility towards his fellow-men, and he felt that his great friend, Henri Guillaumet, possessed and, on one occasion exemplified, this in supreme degree.² On the

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

² This sense of responsibility was also fostered by the spirit of the Line. As Daurat explained to us: 'When we succeeded in rescuing one of our pilots we felt the joy keenly because we all shared in it; it was the kind of experience a man cannot know alone—in isolation from others. Afterwards one begins to think in wider terms: it is only a step from the particular to the general, from this or that comrade to mankind as a whole.'

13th of June, 1930—which is mid-winter in these latitudes—Guillaumet had taken off alone from Santiago in Chile to make his ninety-second crossing of the Andes. Then his plane was reported missing. Saint-Exupéry heard the news in the Managing Director's office in Buenos Aires. He flew off at once to Mendoza, one of the stopping-places of the Line in the foothills of the Cordilleras; and from there he and a fellow pilot, Deley, scoured the mountains in their two planes, tiny scouts against the giant fortress and towering peaks of the Andes. They went on searching for five days in the hope of finding Guillaumet before it was too late.

Guillaumet's subsequent account was that he had taken off in a blinding snowstorm which for the last forty-eight hours had been sweeping down from the Chilean Andes; even on the plains it had piled up snow fifteen feet deep. But, counting upon finding a rift in the cloud-bank, he climbed to twenty thousand feet. There, to his surprise, he suddenly found himself in clear, shimmering air; he now only had to cross the highest peaks of the mountains which loomed out of a sea of cloud ahead of him. He set course confidently for Buenos Aires.

But he was caught in violent currents which forced him down through the cloud; he felt the weight of the whole sky bearing upon him, as though he were the victim of some cosmic disturbance. 'The jolts were so terrible that my leather harness cut my shoulders and was ready to snap. And what with the frosting on the instrument panel, my artificial horizon was invisible, and the wind rolled me over and over like a hat in a road, from eighteen thousand feet down to ten.'¹

At this altitude he managed to straighten out. He found himself flying above a lake—Laguna Diamante—which lay at the bottom of a narrow funnel in the mountains. There was no way out of the trap. He flew round and round the lake, ran out of petrol and then crash-landed. He dragged himself out

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars.*

of the aircraft, but when he tried to stand up he was knocked over by the force of the wind. He then took shelter under the cockpit where he decided to remain until the storm passed over. There he waited for two days and two nights. Only on the third day was he able to get up and walk.

Although he lacked an ice-axe, a rope or any other mountain equipment, he managed somehow to climb his way out of the funnel. At times it meant crawling up steep ice-walls, clinging to shallow footholds which he hacked out with his feet. He trudged on through the first night by moonlight knowing that, in this temperature of 20° C. below zero, he would freeze to death if he did not keep on the move. He suffered from frost-bite; his hands and knees were scarred and bleeding; and from time to time he paused to cut slits in his boots to ease the pain of his feet.

On the following morning he looked up to see an aeroplane glinting overhead in the dazzling sunlight. As it swooped down low he recognised it as one of the Company's aircraft. But after circling a few times it flew off without a sign. Guillaumet guessed, he said afterwards, that it was Saint-Exupéry's because the pilot had taken such a risk in coming down so low.

He went on, but was so exhausted that after a few paces forward he would slither back, stumble, and have to pick himself up. 'But the hardest job I had was to force myself not to think. The pain was too much, and I was really up against it too hard. I had to forget that, or I shouldn't have had the heart to go on walking. But I didn't seem to be able to control my mind. It kept working like a turbine. Still, I could more or less choose what I was to think about. I tried to stick to some film I'd seen, or book I'd read. But the film and the book would go through my mind like lightning, and I'd be back where I was, in the snow. It never failed. So I would think about other things . . .'

And then once again he found himself face downwards in

the snow. But this time he no longer even tried to get up. The snow acted insidiously like an opiate upon him, sapping his will, drowning the sense of pain and fatigue, offering him a sweet, seductive peace. Then scruples, pangs of remorse, assailed him. He thought of his wife and her sorrow, of his friends. He remembered that, if a man disappears without trace, his death is not legally presumed for four years: if that happened to him his wife would not receive her pension and would be penniless. He must make sure, therefore, that his body would be found. He decided to prop it up against a rock close-by, where it would not be washed away by the snows when they melted in the summer. He dragged himself up, but found that once on his feet again he could go on—for a further three days.

Towards the end of this time he realised that death could not be far off. 'I was beginning to lose my memory; I realised that every time I stopped I forgot something. The first time it was a glove and it was cold! I had put it down in front of me and had forgotten to pick it up. The next time it was my watch. Then my knife. Then my compass. Each time I stripped myself of something vitally important. I was becoming my own enemy. And I can't tell you how much it hurt me when I found that out. . . . And with nothing to eat, after three days on my feet, my heart wasn't going any too well. I was crawling along the side of a sheer wall, hanging over space, digging and kicking out pockets in the ice so that I could hold on, when all of a sudden my heart conked. It hesitated. It started up again. Beat crazily . . . I said to it: "Come on, old boy. Go to work. Try beating a little . . ."'

From Mendoza Saint-Exupéry and Deley continued the search. They only stopped at nightfall and once or twice during the day to re-fuel. They went on searching for five days, but even then Saint-Exupéry was reluctant to give up although at Santiago the Chilean Army officers had told him it was hopeless. 'It is mid-winter,' they told him, 'and even if your comrade

survived the landing, he cannot have survived the night. Night in these passes changes a man into ice.' He even tried to bribe bandits and smugglers to form a rescue party, but these men, who ordinarily would commit a crime for a five peso note, refused. 'It would be the end of us,' they said. 'The Andes never gave up a man in winter.'

A week after Guillaumet's disappearance Saint-Exupéry was lunching in a hotel in Mendoza when a man suddenly put his head round the door and shouted: 'They've found Guillaumet!' He immediately rushed down to the airfield. A few minutes later he was flying low along the Mendoza-San Carlos highway, hoping to intercept the car bringing Guillaumet back. When he saw it, he landed beside the road.

The two men fell into each other's arms and broke down. 'Have you found the plane?' Guillaumet asked.

'No,' said Saint-Exupéry.

'Well, then, after all I was right to leave it,' said Guillaumet, adding: 'But, you know, I swear that what I went through, no animal would have gone through.'

Guillaumet had been found by a peasant woman, who nursed him back to life in her mountain-shack, but he showed the effects of his terrible ordeal: his face was splotched and swollen; his hands and feet, still frozen, hung heavy on him like lead; and his fine, strong, peasant physique had become shrunk and wizened. Saint-Exupéry flew him back to Mendoza from where Guillaumet sent a telegram to his wife. The simple message was characteristic. 'Am back. Meet me in Mendoza. Henri.'

Saint-Exupéry afterwards said that the rescue of Henri Guillaumet and their meeting on the road had been the greatest event of his life. No love, he averred, could equal the friendship which they felt for one another. 'Guillaumet,' he later wrote in *Wind, Sand and Stars*, 'was among those bold and generous men who have taken upon themselves the task of spreading their foliage over bold and generous horizons. His

moral greatness consists in his sense of responsibility. He knew that he was responsible for himself, for the mails, for the fulfilment of the hopes of his comrades. He was holding in his hands their sorrow and their joy. To be a man is, precisely, to be responsible. It is to feel shame at the sight of what seems to be unmerited misery. It is to take pride in a victory won by one's comrades. It is to feel that when one lays one's stone, one is contributing to the building of the world.'

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT FLIGHT

On the 12th of May, 1930, Didier Daurat was circling the harbour of St. Louis-du-Sénégal, in West Africa, in a speedboat. He was witnessing the start of one of the Company's most ambitious exploits. On that date Mermoz, with a crew of two, took off in a seaplane to cross the South Atlantic.

That flight was the culmination of many years' dogged effort. As early as 1927 Mermoz had wanted to make the attempt, but the French Government, nervous of accepting any responsibility, forbade him to do so in a landplane; and at one time they even went to the length of ordering all French aerodromes to refuse him more than 1,500 litres of petrol. But now a new plane—the Laté 28—had been fitted with floats, and it was in this plane that Mermoz eventually reached Natal in Brazil.

It was a relatively uneventful flight. Towards evening, not long after leaving the African coast, Mermoz ran into a region notorious for its treacherous weather. He suddenly saw ahead of him the spirals of tornados rising up straight from the sea into a dense black mass of cloud above; and as he flew on, slipping underneath this cloud, he found himself in a strange, fantastic realm. 'Great black water-spouts had reared themselves seemingly in the immobility of temple pillars. Swollen at their tops, they were supporting the squat and lowering arch of the tempest, but through the rifts in the arch there fell slabs of light and the full moon sent her radiant beams between the pillars down upon the frozen tiles of the sea. Through these uninhabited ruins Mermoz made his way, gliding slantwise from one channel of light to the next, circling round these giant pillars in which there must have rumbled the upsurge of the sea, flying for

hours through these corridors of moonlight toward the exit from the temple. And this spectacle was so overwhelming that only after he had got through did Mermoz awaken to the fact that he had not been afraid . . .¹

The flight took twenty-one hours, establishing a long-distance record for seaplanes. Brazil was now shown to be only two days distant from Toulouse; the Argentine three and a half; and Chile four and a half. As a result of the world-wide publicity which followed it, the Company were invited by most of the South American Governments to operate in their countries, and by the beginning of 1931 services were running in Chile, Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay, as well as Brazil and the Argentine. A service had also been established between Caracas in Venezuela and Trinidad in the West Indies.

The Line was also granted by the Portuguese Government an exclusive concession for the use of the Azores which gave them a vital re-fuelling base for their next great project—the crossing of the North Atlantic; and their rivals, Imperial Airways and Pan-American Airways, were obliged to negotiate with them for the use of this base. In return for access to the Azores they offered the French Company the use of their own bases as well as a twenty-five per cent share in all the trans-Atlantic traffic.

These triumphs had been only achieved at great cost in life. In the last two years—1929 and 1930—over a dozen of the best crews had been killed.² It is a remarkable tribute to Daurat's personality that during all this period of disaster he was able to inspire his men to such great feats. He had indeed every reason to be proud of their courage and of the work of the Line. From its humble beginnings after the First World War it had now become one of the most renowned air-lines in the world.

¹ *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

² These included Lécivain and Ducaud at Safi in French Morocco; Jean Garrabos in Barcelona; Marcel Murier in Toulouse; Jean de Gennes in Kenitra; Shenk and his radio operator Pierre le Bouteiller near Malaga; Bruyère and Aubry at Tangiers; and Pranville, with Negrin and Prunetta, near Montevideo.

From his headquarters in Toulouse he paid constant visits to the Company's branches in North Africa and South America. He still imposed the same stern discipline on his crews, indifferent to individual rights and wrongs, hardships and injustices. 'Am I just or unjust?' Riviere asks himself in *Night Flight*. 'I've no idea. All I know is that when I hit hard the accident rate diminishes.' Daurat followed the same precepts, realising that to show any weakness would be to lose prestige and authority.

The men responded with a mixture of awe, fear, admiration and love. 'They were as frightened of him as schoolboys before a headmaster,' Madame Guillaumet told us with a smile; 'and even my husband, who could stand up to any man, hardly dared to contradict Daurat, even when he knew him to be in the wrong.' She then told us a story to illustrate her point. 'My husband, as you know, was a careful pilot. But one day, on taking off, he had a slight crash, and later when he examined the plane he discovered the riggers had crossed the aileron wires. This he reported to Daurat. "Impossible," exclaimed Daurat, "the Company *never* makes a mistake." My husband did not dare say a word. Instead, he told the mechanics, who were repairing the plane, to leave the wires exactly as they were. Daurat later inspected it, examined the wires and made no comment. But,' added Madame Guillaumet, 'at the end of the month Henri did not forfeit his no-crash bonus!'

Another time when Guillaumet was coming in to land at Mendoza after a long and difficult flight across the Andes, he forgot there were mail-bags in the back of the plane and, in an unusual fit of exuberance and high spirits, looped the loop. The mail-bags thumped him in the back, knocked a hole in the fuselage and fell out. Guillaumet was due to fly on that night to Buenos Aires where Daurat was awaiting him. But how could he face him now? He had committed the unpardonable sin: losing the mail. 'From Buenos Aires I telephoned anxiously to Mendoza,' laughed Madame Guillaumet, 'to find out why Henri had not arrived. I was told that, though safe, he could

not come on till the next day. But they wouldn't give me any reason. Next morning, when he turned up, he told us that he and his mechanic had walked back miles and miles through the scrub to look for the mail-bags. By the mercy of Providence they found them. But we didn't dare to tell Daurat about it till many years later.'

Even from the Toulouse headquarters Daurat kept an eye on his pilots. On the 6th of December, 1930, Saint-Exupéry was sent the following letter:

The Managing Director [De Massimi] requests us to inform Monsieur de Saint-Exupéry that he has received a visit from one of his relations, who desired news of him. M. de Saint-Exupéry, it appears, has not written to his mother for two months. Although this matter is a personal one, in which the Company feels itself under no obligation, we request you to intimate to M. de Saint-Exupéry that he show less negligence in the future.

The letter was signed by Didier Daurat.

Daurat refuses today to take the credit for himself. When a journalist recently asked him whether Rivière, the hero of his famous novel *Night Flight*, was a faithful portrait of himself, he answered: 'If you identify me with Rivière you detract from the conception and beauty of that character. There was a Rivière in each one of us.' And he may well have been right.

Up till now little has been said about Saint-Exupéry's private life. But hitherto, apart from his broken engagement, it had presented no great problems to him; and since then he had been absorbed in his career which had become the focus of his energy and idealism. Like any young man, he had had his casual affairs and flirtations. But, says Doctor Pélissier, 'he regarded sex not as something central to life, but as an episodic necessity.'

It was now, while serving as a pilot in South America, that he met the young girl who seemed to embody his idealised

conceptions of love. The story of their relationship is both curious and fascinating. Everything about it was extraordinary—the way in which they met; the origins of the girl herself and her dazzling beauty and unusual temperament; the reasons for their strange attraction to one another and the odd, ‘fairy-tale’ life they tried to lead together; the belief which both of them seemed to share in magic, divination, and telepathic communication; and, last but not least, the jealousies, intrigues, enmities, to say nothing of the gossip and scandal, which their relationship stirred up in Paris during the ‘Thirties. His marriage forms a puzzling chapter in Saint-Exupéry’s history, but it shows us, among other things, how fantastically unreal his approach to life still was: how to the very end he remained ‘*ce garçon extraordinaire qui n’était pas de ce monde.*’

It was towards the end of 1930, when he was thirty-one years old, that Saint-Exupéry met in Buenos Aires a young widow, eight years his junior. Consuelo Suncin (such was her name) had been married to an Argentine journalist, Gomez Carrillo, a man many years older than herself, who had died soon after their marriage. She was born in the Central American State of Salvador, and was strikingly beautiful, with a pure white skin, jet-black hair, large luminous eyes, and regular, perfectly-formed features. In the ‘Thirties, according to one or two people who knew her well, she was one of the loveliest women in Paris.

She also had great vitality, a huge zest for life, and unbounded high spirits. She galloped through life, wild, unbridled, never bothering much to separate fact from fantasy, dreams from reality. For she had an unusual imagination, a capacity to infuse poetry into the commonplace, and to make the impossible and fictional seem real. She was, indeed, to all intents and purposes, the fairy princess who, with a wave of the wand, makes every wish come true; and Saint-Exupéry, childlike, guileless, gullible, wanted to believe in such magical solutions. How different, too, was this young girl from any woman he had met before and,

above all, from the staid, conventional figures of his background and upbringing. At first he was puzzled, then intrigued, and, finally, swept off his feet by this exotic South American beauty.

Consuelo de Saint-Exupéry today lives mainly in Paris but, as it happened, we met her for the first time one summer's evening in London, at a party being given in her honour by the French Military Attaché, General Durosoy. The story of her meeting with Saint-Exupéry is best told in her own words. 'You must first of all learn something about me,' she began, speaking with immense vivacity in a mixture of French, English and Spanish, 'if you want to understand Tonio.' (Saint-Exupéry was always called Tonio—the Spanish abbreviation of Antonio—by Consuelo and her circle; Antoine, by most of his other intimate friends; and 'Saint-Ex.' by his flying comrades.) 'My native country is Salvador, and I was born during a terrible earthquake, which razed my parents' home to the ground. But I was rescued by an Indian, who brought me up in the mountains, feeding me on goat's milk; and for many years I thought he was my father and the goat was my mother. This Indian was a sorcerer and medicine-man, and he initiated me into all the secrets of witchcraft. He made me undergo many strange rites and ceremonies, including a test of courage. I was lowered into a deep well with a fragile white flower between my lips; if the flower withered before I was brought up again then it would mean that, in my fear, I had breathed upon it—in other words, that I was a coward. As it turned out the flower remained quite fresh—and so did I!' This account of her early upbringing has also been related in part by Consuelo de Saint-Exupéry in an autobiographical novel: *The Kingdom of the Rocks*.

'I first met Tonio,' she continued, 'at a big diplomatic reception in Buenos Aires. Just as I was about to leave the party with some friends a young man came into the room. His appearance struck me at once—he was such a tall, broad-shouldered, powerful-looking man. He looked at me and then

came over to where I was sitting. We chatted for a while and then suddenly he said: 'I would like to take you up flying with me tonight to watch the stars.' "Impossible," I replied, as I could not leave my friends. He then insisted he would take them too, and we drove off to the airport. Not long afterwards we found ourselves flying with him in a big transport plane. He had told me to sit in the cockpit with him, but my friends he had locked up in the passenger compartment. After flying for a time he exclaimed: "You must kiss me because I love you." I told him, no, because I was still in mourning for my husband. And then he began to rock the plane, so that we were all airsick—at times, you know, he could be such an "enfant terrible." But I said I'd never kissed a man under a threat and refused to give in. "I know why you won't kiss me," he said, "it's because I'm too ugly." As he spoke, the tears were rolling down his cheeks. In the end I had to obey because, until I did, he refused to land . . .

Friends of the Saint-Exupérys relate many stories about their courtship which illustrate the extravagance of their love-play. But for the biographer it is hard to distinguish between fact and fiction, between the fabric of truth and the later embroideries. One of the many tales is that Consuelo was one day flying with him when she again resisted his overtures; and in revenge he landed in a jungle clearing, left her there and flew off. It is not stated, however, how she found her way back.

Once in Paraguay during a revolution, runs another story, he and Consuelo were watching the fighting in the streets of Asuncion from a balcony. Suddenly Consuelo drew off her glove, flung it into the midst of the mob and dared him to retrieve it. This he did, at considerable risk, but honour was vindicated.

When eventually they became engaged, Mme. Suncin, who lived in France, raised objections to her daughter marrying an airman. Consuelo caught the next boat from Buenos Aires to persuade her. 'On the way to Rio de Janeiro an aircraft followed

us, circling low round and round the ship. I knew that it could only be Tonio. The Captain was extremely angry. He sent for me and said: "If you can't shake off that mad young airman I shall have to put you ashore at Rio." But that was so like Tonio. When he wanted something he would never give up. Now you understand why I married him. *How* could I resist him?

At the beginning of 1931, only a few months after their meeting, Saint-Exupéry applied for leave to return to France, and he and Consuelo were married in the little village church of Agay, the home of Saint-Exupéry's sister, Madame d'Agay, on the Côte d'Azur.

While at Agay Saint-Exupéry met his old friend, André Gide, who on the 31st of March wrote in his Journal: 'Great pleasure in seeing Saint-Exupéry, at Agay, where I had gone to spend two days with P——. Has been back in France less than a month; he has brought from the Argentine a new book and a fiancée. Read the former, saw the latter. I congratulate him warmly; but above all on the book; I hope his fiancée turns out as well . . .' Gide goes on: 'Tonio's stories are so strange and altogether striking that I must note them down at once. He talks at great length about his comrade Guillaumet . . .' Gide then relates the story of Guillaumet's great adventure in the Andes ending up: 'Here courage is no longer a question of risking one's life—but of the very opposite. Tonio must put it down. I shall ask to see the account, and I shall not forgive him if he makes a mess of it. What our literature lacks most today is the quality of heroism.'

The book to which Gide referred is Saint-Exupéry's best-known novel, *Night Flight*, which he had begun writing not long after his arrival in South America. One of the vital problems which faced the Line in those days was the inauguration of a night service, since otherwise they were unable to compete successfully with other land and sea transport on the

same route. 'It is a matter of life and death for us,' says one of the characters, 'for the lead we gain by day on the ships and railways is lost each night.' This task called for exceptional heroism on the part of the pilots, and it is the General Manager of the Company, Rivière (the character was based on Didier Daurat) who has to bear the responsibility of sending them out to face the dangers; and he, consequently, is the real hero of the book.

The action of the story, which is a simple one, takes place in the course of a single night—a night on which Fabien, one of the Company's pilots, and his wireless operator, are lost in a storm. Meanwhile, on the ground, Rivière keeps an anxious vigil; he is represented as outwardly a hard and indeed ruthless man, but though he hides his feelings from his men, it is clear that he is at heart a prey to doubts and uncertainties as to whether he is justified in making them risk their lives. This is made evident when Simone Fabien, the missing pilot's wife, telephones him for news of her husband:

'He had reached a point where not the problem of a small personal grief but the very will to act was in itself an issue. Not so much Fabien's wife as another theory of life confronted Rivière now. Hearing that timid voice, he could not but pity its infinite distress—and know it for an enemy! For action and individual happiness have no truck with each other; they are eternally at war. This woman, too, was championing a self-coherent world with its own rights and duties, that world where a lamp shines at nightfall on a table, flesh calls to mated flesh, a homely world of love and hopes and memories. She stood up for her happiness and she was right. And Rivière too was right, yet he found no words to set against this woman's truth. He was discovering the truth within him, his own inhuman and unutterable truth, by a humble light, the lamplight of a little home!'

It is only by degrees that Rivière succeeds in defining 'this truth within him.' By what right, he asks himself, do I deprive

these men of their contentment and happiness? Clearly, he argues, there can be no justification whatever if the question is simply weighed up in the scales of utilitarian self-interest. But, then, is this the real, underlying motive of human action? 'Even though human life may be the most precious thing on earth, we always behave as if there were something of higher value than human life. . . . But what thing?' And Rivière reflects at another moment: 'We do not pray for immortality, but only not to see our acts and all things suddenly stripped of their meaning; for then the utter emptiness of things reveals itself.'

He never succeeds in defining explicitly the nature of this 'thing,' this mysterious impulse, whose goal lies beyond the self. But he affirms that it is stronger than the instinct of self-preservation or even the claims of love. 'To love, only to love, leads nowhere. Rivière knew a dark sense of duty greater than that of love.'

In his preface to the novel André Gide discussed at some length the philosophy of *Night Flight*. He began by commending the author for having stated so clearly the apparently paradoxical truth that man's happiness lies not in freedom, but in the acceptance of a duty; and he then expressed his approval of the character of Rivière because Rivière realises, as Gide puts it, 'that man is not to seek an end within himself, but to submit and sacrifice his all to some strange thing that commands him and lives through him.' It is probably as clear a definition as is possible of the 'dark sense of duty.'

The novel ends with a magnificent description of the death of Fabien and his wireless operator. They send a desperate message to base that they cannot get down through the cyclone. 'How much petrol left?' base asks; and the answer comes from the doomed plane: 'For thirty minutes.' And Fabien, realising there is no hope, climbs higher and higher:

'Little by little he spiralled up out of the dark pit which closed beneath him. As he rose, the clouds began to shed their

slime of shadow, flowing past him in cleaner, whiter billows. . . . "Too beautiful," he thought. Amid the far-flung treasures of the stars he roved, in a world where no life was save his and his companion's. Like plunderers of fabled cities they seemed, immured in treasure vaults whence there is no escape. Amongst those frozen jewels they were wandering, rich beyond all dreams, but doomed.'

Despite the loss of Fabien, the vital night service continues. Rivière watches from the airfield as another pilot takes off with the mail for Europe, waiting eagerly to 'hear his thunder rise and swell and die into the distance like the tramp of armies marching in the stars.' Thus Rivière's leadership has been triumphantly vindicated.

The novel originally ran to over four hundred pages, but after laborious pruning and revision was reduced to a hundred and eighty one in the first French edition. This fastidious work is evident in the carefully wrought design and form of the story; and the action moves forward inexorably, with the emphasis constantly shifting from event to idea, from air to ground, until, finally, it works up to its superb climax.

The prose, also, is excellent. As a stylist Saint-Exupéry was very uneven. At its worst his style is rambling, diffuse, high-flown, and burdened with words and phrases used emotively rather than for their precise meanings; but at its best, as in *Night Flight*, it is hard, clear, crystalline, and rich in poetic density and images. How beautifully, for instance, he conveys the quiet, gentle, almost 'pastoral' feel of night flight; as when he talks of the crew of the European plane 'finding a stable world softly illuminated all night through,' or of Fabien entering the night 'with a measured slowness as into an anchorage.'

In both theme and form *Night Flight* has something in common with another little masterpiece about valour—Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. Both of them are stories of action, conceived subjectively, and written from within in order to illumine a central idea, to which all the characters are

kept in subordination; both of them are instinct with the feeling for action, which seems to create a unique poetry of its own, something at once warm and intoxicating to the spirit. And the theme of both books is, in essence, the same: self-conquest. The soldier-hero of *The Red Badge* learns to surmount physical fear in the ordeal of battle while in *Night Flight* the airmen, through the renunciation of pleasure and security, find the sublime, the god-like and imperishable in themselves.

Night Flight, dedicated to Didier Daurat, was published by Gallimard, and it enjoyed an immediate success; it was awarded the coveted Prix Fémina and translated into most of the European languages. A film was also made of it by an American film company with Clark Gable starring in the part of Fabien.

These few brief months after his return from South America and his marriage to Consuelo were the gayest, most active, most satisfying of Saint-Exupéry's whole life. He had every reason to be happy; he suddenly found himself a successful author; his career as a pilot met his need for action, reality and discipline; and love gave him an outlet for all the joy and fantasy of his nature.

His life was hectic. He was flying continuously the night mail on part of the South American route, from Casablanca to Port Étienne in French Mauritania. He would be off from Casablanca at four in the afternoon and down at Port Étienne at six the following morning; and that same night he would set off on the return journey. In the interval he and Consuelo, now alone in Paris, exchanged long, sentimental, romantic telegrams.

On short spells of leave, he would fly back as fast as possible to Toulouse; and, without stopping for a shave or a change of clothes, catch the 'Rapide' to Paris. He would arrive at the Hotel Lutetia looking like an old tramp: his face covered with three days' growth of beard; trousers torn and frayed; an old pair of sandals on his feet; and over his arm his blue 'burberry'

fastened by string instead of a belt. He would dash down to the barber while the hotel porter was sent out to buy him a new shirt; and then he was ready, with his young bride, to face the gatherings of writers and critics. He took his success with a mixture of bashfulness and delight, like a schoolboy who has just won a first prize. 'During receptions given in his honour,' writes one of his biographers, Pierre Chevrier, 'he appeared gauche, blushing, and almost tongue-tied with shyness, and if a friend came up to him he clutched at his hand in silence, as though reaching out to a lifebuoy . . .'

But alas! the joy and the bliss were short-lived. Circumstances soon altered the whole course and direction of his life. In the midst of the success, the gaiety and the fun a thunderbolt suddenly fell from the skies: the news reached him that the Line was on the verge of disaster.

The story of its disintegration is both tragic and sordid. At first Saint-Exupéry could scarcely believe the facts. And, as the squalid details gradually came to light, revealing how political corruption, base ambition, and private jealousies and intrigues had ruined this great enterprise, he was struck with horror and dismay.

The story begins with the failure of the French Government to pay by a certain date the subsidies they had promised to the Company. Its proprietor, the wealthy industrialist Bouilloux-Lafont, happened to own a chain of banks in the French provinces, and he had decided to draw on the credit of these banks to bolster up the Company's finances. His political enemies came to hear of this, published the facts and spread panic amongst the small investors, mainly peasants, shopkeepers and retired rentiers. The outcry forced the Government to send accountants to South America; minor irregularities were discovered in the Company's balance-sheets; and the affair blew up almost to the dimensions of the Dreyfus scandal.

The Air Minister, who was afraid that Bouilloux-Lafont would close down the airlines, sent privately for Didier Daurat,

and persuaded him to carry on in his job regardless of the outcome. Bouilloux-Lafont then accused Daurat of disloyalty. The Line split into two factions, one of which was under the influence of an old enemy of Daurat's, the pilot Serre. Serre was a syndicalist who, some years before, had quarrelled with Daurat over questions of discipline and the rights of employees. This faction made absurd accusations against their old chief, charging him, amongst other things, with pillaging the mail.

Bouilloux-Lafont then found himself in even graver trouble. He had been shown certain documents in which it was alleged that senior Government officials had been bribed by the Germans to withhold the subsidies. It was a well-known fact that Lufthansa had been trying to oust the Line from South America, and only the year before the Graf Zeppelin had gone to Rio de Janeiro on a demonstration flight. Bouilloux-Lafont had, therefore, some grounds for supposing the documents to be genuine, and he sent them in good faith to General Weygand, who passed them on to the Prime Minister, Paul Painlevé. It was then discovered that the documents were forgeries, probably planted by one of his political enemies. Painlevé instituted an action against Bouilloux-Lafont, and in March, 1932, he was arrested for complicity in forgery.

As the degrading trial dragged on month after month the affairs of the Line fell into confusion and disorder. At one moment many of the pilots did not receive their salaries, which caused grave financial embarrassment to Saint-Exupéry. As usual, he and his wife had been spending extravagantly, and had used up the royalties from *Night Flight*. He wrote pathetic letters from Casablanca describing his harassed state of mind.

In the end Bouilloux-Lafont lost his case. The Line went into liquidation, and its shares were sold for a ridiculously small sum to another French airline Company, Air-Orient. In 1933 Air-Orient, together with all the other major French air lines, was absorbed into a newly-constituted company, Air France. It was the end of the glorious history of French aviation in South

America. Air France withdrew from the whole South American field, leaving it to their rivals, Pan-American Airways and Lufthansa, to exploit the valour and heroism of the pioneers. It was only owing to the persistent efforts of Jean Mermoz that Air France decided in 1934 to maintain a regular trans-Atlantic service between Paris and Buenos Aires.

From North Africa Saint-Exupéry had followed these proceedings with mounting indignation. He was deeply incensed by the treatment of Daurat and the conduct of Serre. 'I was completely happy with Aéropostale (he wrote to an acquaintance) before your friend Serre, with his disastrous good intentions, ruined the whole spirit of sacrifice.' Although his heart was no longer in the job he continued to fly the Company's North African services, but, depressed by the shock of the catastrophe and by financial worries, asked repeatedly for spells of leave, which drew angry protests from the management. On one occasion they threatened to stop his pay.

But he carried on for another few months, mainly out of loyalty to Didier Daurat and respect for his leadership. Then he heard that Daurat, sickened in heart by the transformation of the Line into a soulless commercial enterprise, had given up his post, and realising that the spirit of the old days had now vanished for ever, he sent in his own resignation. The epoch of triumph and glory was over.

CHAPTER VIII

'THE BLUE EPOCH'

By the end of 1932 Saint-Exupéry was back in Paris, without money, without a job, without any prospects for the future. It must have been a painful reminder of those wretched early days after leaving the Air Force. But now he was thirty-two years old.

His first step was to take a small apartment in the Rue de Castellane, which was to be the first of many changes of residence during these restless years; a few months later he had moved to the Rue de Chanaleilles. Friends were appalled by the disorder in which he lived; books, cigarette stubs, old tooth brushes and sleeping tablets were jumbled together on the floor, while piles of unmended socks, frayed suits and dirty linen were heaped up in a corner. The room was often cold because he could not afford to pay his gas bill, and he was harassed by bailiffs' summonses. They reached him printed on blue sheets of paper; hence he always referred to this dismal period of his life as 'l'époque bleue.'

Another disagreeable surprise was the reaction of some of his old flying comrades to the publication of *Night Flight*. These, he found, were accusing him of being an amateur airman who had joined the Line so that he could achieve a cheap notoriety at their expense by writing a novel about it. This squalid travesty of his motives made him feel numb and sick, and out of the bitterness of his heart he wrote to his old friend who was then in America:

Guillaumet,

I hear you are coming back, and my heart beats at the news. If you knew what a terrible life I have led since your departure, and what an immense disgust for life I have

gradually come to feel. Because I wrote that unfortunate book I have been made miserable and my comrades have ostracised me. Mermoz will tell you what things have been said about me by those whom I have not seen for ages but whom once I was fond of. They will tell you I am pre-tentious! And there is not a soul from Toulouse to Dakar who does not believe it. One of my gravest worries has been my debts, and I haven't always been able to pay my gas bills, and I am still wearing the old clothes I had three years ago.

Still, you are arriving perhaps at a moment when the wind is changing a bit, and I shall be able to live down my shame. After so many disillusionings this unjust legend created about me has prevented my writing to you. Perhaps you, too, thought that I had changed. And I could not bring myself to justify myself before the one man whom I may perhaps look upon as a brother.

Don't go to an hotel. Come here to my apartment. It's yours. I am going off to the country to work for four or five days. So you will be as though at home, and you will have the convenience of the telephone. But perhaps, after all, you will refuse! And then I shall have to admit that I have lost my best friend.

We hear no more of this ignoble episode which was no doubt prompted by jealousy, but during the fits of depression which were so frequent at this time he would remark sadly: 'I am going to buy a gorgeous globe of the earth, and I shall place upon it little flags to mark those spots where I have a loyal friend; alas, there aren't many of them.'

Spasmodically, he made efforts to earn his living as a journalist, but he had always been unable to write on subjects which did not grip him; nor was he the type of man to pull strings in order to obtain commissioned work. Idle, he drifted about Paris. All the old zest and enthusiasm had left him. 'One used to find him,' writes Pierre Chevrier, 'at the Deux Magots, gloomy, listless, a prey to inner anxiety, drinking carafe after carafe of wine to the detriment of his liver. He had become

gross, bloated, puffed out, and his face more than ever had that haunted, startled look. It was as though all the time he were saying to himself: “How could fate have been so cruel to me?”

His most pressing problem, lack of money, was temporarily solved when he persuaded M. Latécoère, the aircraft manufacturer, who had originally started the Line, to take him on for a time as a test pilot at Toulouse. But it was not a fortunate choice since, apart from courage and enthusiasm, he lacked the qualities of precision required for such an exacting job. Hard as he tried, he could never conquer that fatal absentmindedness. Once he forgot to lock the door of the aircraft before taking off, and the ground staff were horrified to see a large piece of metal drop off the fuselage while he was circling the airfield. On another occasion he reported to the engineer that his Laté 28 was flying wing-heavy. ‘Which wing?’ asked the engineer. But Saint-Exupéry could not remember; his mind had been so full of other things since then, and he had to go up again and repeat the test. This vagueness amused his fellow pilots, but infuriated the mechanics and engineers.

From Toulouse he was sent to test hydroplanes on a large salt-water lake near Perpignan. This torpid lake became a symbol for him of the stagnation and boredom of provincial life. ‘I have just returned,’ he wrote to a friend in Paris, ‘from the hydroplane base where I have been carrying out trials; my ears are still buzzing and my hands are still smeared with oil. And I am drinking all alone on the terrace of a little café, while it is growing dark but I don’t feel like going anywhere for dinner . . . I am here on my own because I go backwards and forwards between Toulouse, Perpignan and Saint Raphaël. I spend most of my time beside a lake which is neither sea nor lake, but a flat, lifeless stretch of water—I don’t like it at all. . . . And when at nightfall I return to Perpignan, such an evening as this drags out interminably. I don’t know anyone here and I don’t even want to. As I sit alone writing in the corner I am

exasperated by all the jokes, the chatter and the platitudes: it's like the sound of a stewpot that is always on the boil. The people will go on stewing in it until they tumble into their graves—what is the point of life?' Yet he did not yearn for security of any kind, in spite of his misery. 'Two people whom I know dropped over to see me: a confident young married couple whose domestic life, though doubtless a happy one, seemed to me terribly sour. You know the peevishness of people who enjoy too much security. The meaningless outbursts of spite, in the midst of all their contentment. I liked them very much, yet when they went off I breathed again; there is a certain lulling kind of peace which is hateful to me.'

At Saint-Raphaël he came, for by no means the first or the last time, very close to death. He was bringing in a hydroplane to land in the Bay when, for no very cogent reason, the machine nose-dived into the water and sank. Saint-Exupéry was trapped in the fuselage, but for a few moments was able to breathe freely; then water began slowly to enter the plane. It would only be a matter of minutes, he realised, before he was drowned. But with the approach of death, as he later told friends, he experienced not a sensation of panic but, on the contrary, an overwhelming inner peace which seemed to invade his whole being; and the water, in reality icy-cold, seemed to him warm and comforting. Like Guillaumet in the Andes, it had taken him, he said, all his will-power to fight this opportunity of deliverance—this opportunity to cast off all the seething cares and anxieties of this world.

Instead of giving up, he fought his way back through the flooded fuselage. There, as though by an act of grace, he found an open hatch, through which he floated up to the surface, where he was picked up by a motor-boat crew. For several hours afterwards he vomited up salt water. But after such a long immersion everybody was astonished to find him alive at all.

The months which he spent as a test-pilot on hydroplanes

form, exteriorly speaking, a pointless chapter in Saint-Exupéry's life. But, in the case of the artist, who can predict what will prove valuable experience and what will not? And it was in describing the take-off of a hydroplane that he wrote one of his most thrilling passages of prose: 'The motors are running free and the plane is already ploughing the surface of the sea. Under the dizzying whirl of the scythe-like propellers, clusters of silvery water bloom and drown the flotation gear. The element smacks the sides of the hull with a sound like a gong, and the pilot can sense this tumult in the quivering of his body. He feels the ship charging itself with power as from second to second it picks up speed. He senses, in these fifteen tons of matter, a gathering climax that is about to make flight possible. He closes his hands over the controls, and little by little in his bare palms he receives the gift of this power. And when it is ripe, then, in a gesture gentler than the culling of a flower, the pilot severs the ship from the water and settles it in the air.'

After six months' absence he was once again back, jobless, in Paris. This time his bouts of restlessness were such that he is said to have taken not only to heavy drinking, but even to drugs in an attempt to shake it off.

He was so distraught that, according to his wife, 'he even hated sitting down in a chair and would pace up and down the room, as though he felt cramped and ill at ease on the earth.' One day he suddenly told her that he had decided to sell up their home and buy a houseboat, in which they could roam the world together; but the project never came off.

Whenever possible, he chose apartments on the top floor of tall blocks of buildings which opened to the wide sky. For a time he and Consuelo shared a pent-house apartment in the Place Vauban which towered above the Invalides and the Paris rooftops; there were several rooms, almost bare, except for a divan and a few basket chairs, but on fine nights one could go up on to the roof to gaze at the moon and the stars, and after

dinner in the evenings Saint-Exupéry often took his guests up there.

Even short trips in the air provided some relief. 'Let's go to Marseilles for the day,' he would say to a friend on the spur of the moment, and they would jump into a plane and set off. Free from the ties of the earth, he would grow calmer, and the feeling of speed, of annihilating space and time, soothed his jangled nerves.

His restlessness may have been partly due to the chaos of his personal relationships at this period. As he grew older, women seem to have been more and more attracted to him; attracted by his charm, wit and intelligence and, later, by his literary success and fame; and, above all, they were fascinated by the rather unusual combination of the sensitive artist and robust man of action. 'There was a bit of the caveman about Saint-Ex.,' as one of his women friends rather naively put it. 'Compared with him, the average French intellectual seemed, somehow, insipid and shadowy—a mere walking encyclopædia of ideas!' Women were also flattered by the interest which he showed in them and their problems.

On the other hand, Saint-Exupéry's attitude to women seems to have been unrealistic and immature, partly perhaps because he was too much of a romantic, and partly perhaps because he expected too much of human nature. The picture that emerges from the welter of conflicting statements is of a man whose various complexities and instabilities of temperament never permitted him to resolve the vital problem of love. Never was he to derive from it any peace of mind or enduring emotional satisfaction.

His stormy relations with Consuelo soon became a favourite topic of Paris gossip. One of their acquaintances went so far as to publish a grotesque and scurrilous novel allegedly about their private life—called *Le Baiser à Consuelo*—and Saint-Exupéry is reputed to have challenged the writer to a duel. The challenge, however, was not accepted.

But their marriage survived all these vicissitudes, and to the end of his life he wrote her love letters, some of which she has read to us. He also felt a strong responsibility towards her, and as the years went by he seems to have treated her rather like a father treats a favourite, if wayward, child. Was it not he, after all, who had uprooted this tender young plant from its native soil?

Shortly before his death he composed a prayer for her which was recently published in the French Press. It is a touching fragment:

PRAYER THAT CONSUELO SHOULD SAY EVERY EVENING:

Lord, there is no need to trouble you greatly. Grant that I be as I truly am. In small things I seem vain, but in big things I am humble. In small things I seem an egoist but in big things I am capable of giving everything, even my life. In small things I often seem to lack purity but in purity lies my only happiness.

Lord, grant that I may always be what my husband knows that I am.

Lord, Lord, save my husband because without him I should be an orphan, but grant, Lord, that he may die before me because although he appears strong, he would suffer too much if he could no longer hear me about the home. Lord, spare him, above all, that anguish. Grant that he may always hear me about the house even if sometimes I am noisy and break things.

Help me to be faithful and to stay away from those whom he mistrusts or who are his enemies. That would bring him unhappiness because his life is centred in me.

Lord, protect our house.

Your Consuelo.

Amen!

Something of his general attitude to love and sex, particularly later in life, is shown in his posthumously published work, *The Wisdom of the Sands*.

It appears that I have fallen into error on the subject of women.

O Lord, if only I had not simply considered them as ground to be cultivated . . .

I have found nothing in voluptuousness but the prodigiously useless pleasures of the miser. I have only found myself again; and the echo of my pleasure wearies me.

He speaks of the commerce of love, of that sad, unrewarding, sterile traffic:

What may you hope to obtain from the courtesan? . . . The difference lies in giving, and no gift can be made to the courtesan, for whatever you bring her, she regards it perforce as tribute money.

Real love, on the other hand, he considered to be truly creative, since through the free exchange and acceptance of the mutual gift, the two personalities become enriched and, in a sense, created afresh.

For true love is inexhaustible: the more you give, the more you have. And if you go and draw at the true fountainhead, the more water you draw, the more abundant is its flow . . .

Through love, he believed, one can know the wider harmony of life, the sense of belonging to the oneness and wholeness of things: 'When you love a woman you love what is beyond her; and because of this love you love all things.' And again:

You (i.e. woman) lie in my arms weary as a sleeping town. You are only one step in my ascent towards God.

And to Dr. Péliissier he once remarked: 'I have not laid in my provisions in order to lock them up in a woman for purposes of self-gratification.'

Apart from these general reflections there is scarcely any reference to love or passion in Saint-Exupéry's books. In private life he seldom mentioned these matters. In a letter to Péliissier:

‘I find such trouble in speaking of my little dramas that, if I say three words, that’s something. Don’t think, however, that my reticence is a sign that these things are of no consequence to me. A terrible inhibition surrounds my domestic problems.’ And as Jean Lelcu, an Air Force friend during the War, wrote: ‘His private life was an inviolable sanctuary. He never gave us those confidences that a man, who talked as much as he did, sometimes makes to a friend.’

In these years of trial he often thought about religion and, above all, about the mysteries of faith. Pélissier relates that once in Paris Saint-Exupéry rang him up late at night to ask the doctor to go with him to a certain café in Montparnasse. There Saint-Exupéry had a few rather troubled words in private with a woman; afterwards, greatly disturbed, he summoned a taxi, and the two men drove off. ‘Take us anywhere you like,’ Saint-Exupéry told the driver. And then, turning to Pélissier, he suddenly confided his anguish of mind and his desire for faith: ‘If only I had faith I would become a Dominican, but I cannot do so without it; that would be dishonest. Now you know why I am in despair.’

‘If only I had faith I would become a monk!’ It was a phrase now constantly on his lips. There were even times when he seemed to have found it, as when, entering a church one afternoon during choral practice, he felt ‘exactly as though I were on board a ship in full sail. And I experienced an overwhelming conviction; everything was moving forward with purpose, straight as a ship on its course. In the choir, the crew; myself, a passenger—or perhaps only a stowaway. Although I felt I had slipped in there under false pretences, yet, I was bowled over—bowled over by a testimony which I never succeeded in holding on to.’

The quest was never given up altogether, and it appears in itself to have given him some measure of comfort. ‘To love without hope is not, after all, to despair,’ he wrote later. ‘That

is to say, one can still feel oneself part of the Infinite. And one's guiding-star on the way never goes out. One can give, give, give. But how odd, all the same, that the gift of faith has been denied to me. One loves God without hope: that is me.'

It is probable that only Christianity could have offered Saint-Exupéry a secure and final resting-place, but though he again and again seemed to be making towards it, he always fell short of the goal. This cannot be easily explained. All his writings are shot through with a spirit of worship and veneration, particularly for man and the 'divinity' within him; on the other hand, they turn a blind eye to the problem of evil and the doctrine of the Fall. It may well be that he could never accept original sin and consequently the essential Christian dualism was absent, so that there was no place for the mediating role of Christ. He remained to the end an idealist, an anguished idealist, ceaselessly searching for a faith, a focus for his idealism.

In the spring of 1934 Saint-Exupéry applied to Air France for a job. The Company would not take him on as a regular pilot, but attached him to their publicity department. A single-engined aircraft, a Simoon, was put at his disposal, and with a mechanic by the name of Prévot (who became a devoted friend, sharing his many later adventures), he flew all over Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, once even to Saigon, lecturing on the work of Air France and describing his own flying experiences. In return he received a small monthly salary and a part of the earnings from the lectures.

At that time private aviation was in its heyday. The spectacular flights of Lindbergh, the Mollisons, Amelia Earhart and other pioneers had made flying into a sport and a fashion amongst the well-to-do, who bought their own aeroplanes, joined flying clubs and met at international air rallies; and even poor folk realised that the aeroplane was rapidly changing the tempo and character of their lives. Saint-Exupéry consequently did not lack sympathetic, appreciative audiences. But he was a poor

lecturer. His shyness and diffidence in public gave the impression he was distraught, or even bored with his subject. But occasionally, especially when he was describing his own experiences, he would fling his notes away and, speaking extempore and with fervour, grip everybody by the vividness of his narrative.

Princess Marthe Bibesco, for instance, told us that when he lectured in Bucharest on the invitation of her husband, who was President of the International Aeronautical Federation, he held his listeners spellbound with the story of his later crash in the Libyan desert, where he had nearly died of thirst. 'He described it so graphically,' she said, 'that we felt our mouths getting drier and drier, and when the lecture ended there was a stampede to the buffet for drinks. We clamoured for wine, for lemonade, even for water—for anything which would quench our thirsts!'¹

During a tour of the Eastern Mediterranean he visited Tripoli, Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Greece. At Tripoli he was the guest of Marshal Balbo, a flamboyant, buccaneer figure, whose intractable character had already put him out of favour with Mussolini. The two airmen sat up late one night in the Palace swapping flying stories, and when they got on to the subject of Mermoz, Balbo decided he must immediately send him a picture postcard. None was available, and an Ethiopian guard was sent off, there and then in the middle of the night, to rouse a stationer.

On the Turkish frontier Saint-Exupéry was mistaken by some peasants for a Bolshevik because the Simoon was painted red, and he was only allowed to proceed after a telephone call had been put through to Constantinople. And in a restaurant at Athens he was delighted when, after complaining about a bill in which he had been charged for dishes never ordered or

¹ 'I remember the anguish which gripped us,' wrote Dr. Pélissier, 'when one evening on his return from Libya, he sat down on the sofa, and with head lowered and speaking in a monotone, he related the story of his adventures in the desert. . . . When he finished, our throats were dry and we could not utter a single sound.' (*Les Cinq Visages de Saint-Exupéry*.)

caten, the waiter freely admitted his error with the explanation: 'But what can Monsieur expect in such hard times?'

He had intended continuing his journey to Rome, but when the French Ambassador, Charles de Chambrun, telegraphed that there had recently been anti-French demonstrations in the capital, he returned directly to France.

After a number of these flights, Saint-Exupéry began to feel a renewed confidence in himself and a strong attachment to his Simoon, in which he and Prévot had flown thousands of miles without trouble or mishap. In the last days of 1935 they decided to set out together on a much more adventurous flight.

A prize of fifteen thousand francs (then about two thousand pounds sterling) had been offered to the owner of the aircraft which, by the 1st January, 1936, had flown in the fastest time from Paris to Saigon in French Indo-China; the record, held by a Frenchman—André Japy—then stood at 87 hours. Saint-Exupéry believed that, by dispensing with a wireless set and carrying extra fuel tanks instead, he could reduce the time to 65 hours, which would have been a notable achievement for those days.

Unfortunately, circumstances from the beginning were against him. According to Pierre Chevrier, he was in no condition for such a strenuous undertaking, since he was particularly worried at the time by his domestic and other personal problems, and his nervous vitality was low; and, secondly, he had only decided on the flight at the last moment, leaving himself only a fortnight in which to make hurried preparations. He turned up at Le Bourget in the early hours of the morning of the 29th December, looking tired and wan after a succession of sleepless nights. But paradoxically, danger could be soothing, almost a refuge, in times of stress and strain. Describing the departure of the two well-known French transatlantic flyers, Codos and Rossi, on another long-distance flight, he wrote:

'That morning pilot and navigator take their last stroll, from their car to the aeroplane, surrounded by profferers of advice,

publicity-agents and nonentities, a whole crowd of people who . . . believe that, in congratulating them or joking with them or tapping them on the shoulder, they become their equals. . . . But already the two kinds of men are distinct and apart, like two races. There are those who elect to stay and those who elect to leave. There are those who, in an hour or two, will settle down again to their mediocre political preoccupations, their intrigues, their security. And there are those who feel themselves purified, vindicated, because all this vainglory which men love, this sporting publicity, these requests, interviews, solicitations, are leading them, when all is said and done, not to wealth or honours, but are leading them only to the right, a right now incontestably theirs, to risk their own necks—are leading them towards this dawn, this light and break of a new day, in which they have a two to one chance against them of ever being able to love again. But regarding this love, a love which is mysteriously welling up in their breasts, they remain silent, joking if necessary with the imbeciles, and shaking them by the hand, not out of fear of otherwise appearing constrained, but out of a sort of spiritual modesty.'

What he said of Codos and Rossi, he might equally have said of himself.

There is a long and magnificent description of this ill-fated adventure in *Wind, Sand and Stars*. Before setting off they visited the 'met.' officer at Le Bourget, Monsieur Viaud, who, 'stooping over his maps like a medieval alchemist over an alembic,' conjured up all his secret lore and knowledge, prophesying the areas of storm, holding forth learnedly about fronts and depressions and low-pressure regions.

On the tarmac Prévot, waiting beside the aircraft, assured Saint-Exupéry with a broad, good-humoured grin that the Simoon was in the top of her form. 'I walked round my ship, stroking her wings with my hand in a caress that I believe was

love.' Then they clambered into the cockpit, where Saint-Exupéry found 'a particular atmosphere in the tiny cabin in which, still only half awake, you stow away your thermos-flasks and over-night bag; in the fuel tanks, heavy with power; and, best of all, in the magical instruments set like jewels in their panel and glimmering like a constellation in the dark of the night. The mineral glow of the artificial horizon, those stethoscopes designed to take the heart-beat of the heavens, are things a pilot loves . . .'

They followed the Rhône valley to Marseilles, where they stopped for the repair of a leaky fuel tank. Then out over the Mediterranean, across Sardinia, bathed in brilliant sunshine, and by the evening they were re-fuelling at Bizerta on the North Tunisian coast. At the airport there Saint-Exupéry saw two cars collide head-on, giving him a foreboding of his own disaster, 'of that hoarse grunt, that same snarl of destiny, keeping its appointment with us.'

They took off again before sunset, heading for Cirenaica. 'The diurnal death of the world is a slow death. It is only little by little that the divine beacon of daylight recedes from me. The earth rises and seems to spread like a mist. The first stars tremble as if shimmering in green water. Hours must pass before their glimmer hardens into the frozen glitter of diamonds. I shall have a long wait before I witness the soundless frolic of the shooting stars.'

At Benghazi, where the airport had been lit up for them as for a gala-night, they re-fuelled again; and then, well up to schedule, they headed for the Nile Valley. Saint-Exupéry had at first intended to follow the African coastline, a superb landmark, but unfortunately it was studded with forbidden zones. So they turned inland across the Libyan desert, reckoning that after three and a half hours' flying, they would strike the Nile somewhere between Cairo and Alexandria.

It was a pitch-black moonless night. At one in the morning they ran into towering masses of cumulus cloud which gradually

enveloped them, and as they had no wireless they could not check their position. So they flew on.

After four hours they concluded they must have crossed the Nile, and Saint-Exupéry decided to descend through the cloud-bank. Below it lay a pall of mist, which gave them the illusion that the earth was further beneath them; the altimeter at the time was still registering over one thousand feet.

And then, suddenly, as they continued to descend, ‘a terrific crash rocked our world to its foundations. One second, two seconds passed. The plane quivered, and I waited with a grotesque impatience for the forces within it to burst like a bomb. . . . Five, six seconds. And we were seized by a spinning motion, a shock which jerked our cigarettes out of the window, pulverised the starboard window—and then nothing, nothing but a frozen immobility. I shouted to Prévot: “Jump!” And we dived together through the wrecked window and found ourselves standing, side by side, sixty feet from the plane.’

They had crashed in the desert on a plateau strewn with round black pebbles which, rolling over and over like ball-bearings beneath the fuselage, had cushioned the impact, probably saving their lives.

‘Our prospects were by no means cheerful,’ continued Saint-Exupéry in the official report which he later made to Air France. ‘Our reserves of water had been destroyed and we had no idea of our position within about two hundred miles. We set out at once, having indicated our plans, in letters thirty feet high, on the ground. We had just over a pint of coffee and we had to reach help before thirst overtook us.

‘That day we covered roughly forty miles, including the trudge back to the aircraft. About twenty miles away, from the top of a ridge, we were unable to sight anything, except mirages which dissolved at our approach. We thought it best to return in the hope that an aircraft might have spotted us. That day we finished our last dregs of coffee.

'At dawn on the second day we collected about half a pint of dew from the wings and the fuselage, but it was mixed with paint and oil and was not a great deal of help to us.

'I decided on another plan and left Prévot behind with the plane. His job was to prepare and light fires (with magnesium flares which give a beautiful white light, and not with non-existent vegetation, as we had been told to do), to serve as a beacon for searching aircraft. Meanwhile I set off alone, still without water, on further explorations.

'That day I walked for about eight to nine hours at a brisk pace, and it was the more exhausting inasmuch as, even when the ground was hard, I had to mark my tracks for the return. Darkness overtook me before I got back, but the fires which Prévot had lighted helped me during the last few miles.

'Up till now, no aircraft had flown over us, and so we decided that we must be outside the range of help. Also, we were beginning to feel dreadfully the lack of water. We resolved to leave at dawn, abandoning the machine, and to go on walking until we collapsed altogether. It seemed useless to return again to the aircraft since no one was looking for us here. I remembered how Guillaumet was saved in this way in the Andes, and I decided to follow his example.

'That night we counted upon collecting a little dew on a parachute which we spread on the ground. Unfortunately, we were made to pay dearly for the first mouthful of water, vomiting bile most violently for half an hour afterwards; it may have been due to the coating on the parachute, or to the fact that there were deposits of salt at the bottom of the reserve tank of petrol, in which we had previously wrung out our clothes.

'We left, consequently, an hour late, still convulsed by nausea, and not thinking we should get very far. We had decided to go north-east, simply because we had not yet been in that direction, but we did not have much hope of that either.

'Next morning we were so exhausted that we could only

advance about two hundred yards at a time, and then we came upon a track in the desert, and there we were picked up.'

They had run into a stray Bedouin caravan. After a camel ride lasting three hours, they were put down at an Arab encampment while the cameleers went for help. Thence they were conveyed by car to a soda and salt factory out in the desert, in charge of a Swiss engineer; and by midnight they found themselves in Cairo.

Meanwhile, British aircraft had been vainly searching for them, and back in Paris a large number of Saint-Exupéry's friends and relations had gathered in the Hotel Pont Royal to await news, until a telephone message from Cairo ended their anxious vigil. That night when the French Minister in Cairo, Monsieur de Witasse, went to visit Saint-Exupéry in his bedroom at the Continental Hotel, there was a telegram lying on his table. It had been sent by his friends, and its simple words—'SO TERRIBLY HAPPY'—touched him to the quick.

Although he was weak and exhausted and still suffering from an apparently unquenchable thirst, de Witasse found him in good spirits. 'I am dehydrated,' he informed the Minister. And he had laid out on the floor at regular intervals, between the door of his bedroom and the bed, a bottle of champagne, a bottle of whisky and a bottle of Vichy water. 'These represent the three stages of a man's life,' exclaimed Saint-Exupéry, striding from one bottle to another. 'The last stage is, of course, the stage of reason.' The two men drank a toast together to a speedy recovery.

A week later, when they drove out to inspect the wreckage of the Simoon, they discovered that they had crashed about a hundred and twenty-five miles west of Cairo; and they reckoned that, all in all, they had tramped about the same number of miles. Normally, a man could only count on surviving nineteen hours without water in the Libyan desert, where the evaporation rate is even higher than in the Sahara, and their three days' march, with little more than a pint of liquid between them,

was a feat of unusual endurance, even for a man as strong as Saint-Exupéry.¹

But even in the worst moments of their ordeal his powers of fresh observation had not deserted him. He recalled later in *Wind, Sand and Stars* how he and Prévot had noticed one day in the sand the burrows of fennecs—the small, long-eared foxes of the African desert—and that night they decided to lay improvised snares at the mouths of the holes. But next morning they were still empty.

‘Well,’ continues Saint-Exupéry, ‘this meant that I should not be drinking blood today; and indeed I hadn’t expected to. But though I was not disappointed, my curiosity was aroused. What was there in the desert for these animals to live on? . . . I spotted the tracks made by one of them, and gave way to the impulse to follow them. They led to a narrow stream of sand where each footprint was plainly outlined and where I marvelled at the pretty palm formed by the three toes spread fanwise on the sand. I could imagine my little friend trotting blithely along at dawn and licking the dew off the rocks. Here the tracks were wider apart: my fennec had broken into a run. And now I see that a companion has joined him and they have trotted on side by side. These signs of a morning stroll gave me a strange thrill. They were signs of life, and I loved them for that. I almost forgot that I was thirsty . . .’

And then, when having given up all hope of rescue, he had accepted the imminence of death, he had felt a sense of peace and detachment, exactly as he had felt in the fuselage of the submerged hydroplane three years before: ‘Consider what had happened to me: I had thought myself lost, had touched the very bottom of despair; and then, when the spirit of renunciation had filled me, I had known peace; I know now what I

¹ According to his wife, he had such a strong constitution that he would work continuously for days and nights on end without suffering any ill-effects; and Dr. Péliissier also noted that he needed very little sleep and appeared to live on his store of nervous energy and the exhilaration of new ideas.

was not conscious of at the time—that in such an hour a man feels that he has finally found himself and has become his own friend. An essential inner need has been satisfied, and against that satisfaction, that self-fulfilment, no external power can prevail. Never shall I forget that, lying buried to the chin in sand, strangled slowly to death by thirst, my heart was infinitely warm beneath the desert stars . . .’

Judged by material standards the experience had been a costly failure, for not only had they lost the prize, but the expenses of the flight had been heavy; he was now deeper in debt than ever.¹ But he was not one to regret an experience which had been spiritually enriching. Compared to that, money meant little to him: ‘If I draw up the balance-sheet of the hours that have truly counted in my life,’ he wrote in *Wind, Sand and Stars*, ‘surely I find those that no wealth could have procured for me. . . . There is no buying the night-flight with its hundred thousand stars, its serenity, its few hours of sovereignty. It is not money that can procure for us that new vision of the world won through hardship—those trees, flowers, women, those treasures made fresh by the dew and colour of life which the dawn restores to us, this concert of little things that sustain us and make up our compensation . . .’

¹ Incidentally, an exasperating report appeared in a French paper alleging, amongst other absurdities, that he had made a deliberate forced-landing in the desert for publicity purposes, choosing a spot conveniently close to Cairo; and feeling that his honour as an airman was at stake, he claimed substantial damages for libel.

CHAPTER IX

DESPERATE CRUSADER

For a few years in the middle of the Nineteen-thirties Saint-Exupéry carried out a number of assignments as a foreign correspondent to European countries, beginning as a special observer for *Paris-Soir* of the May-Day celebrations in Moscow in 1935. This was followed by two visits to Spain, one to Barcelona for *L'Intransigeant* in August 1936, a month after the outbreak of the Civil War; and another to Madrid during the siege in the early summer of 1937 for *Paris-Soir*. He also made a tour of Germany on his own account in 1937, in his Simoon plane, to get his personal impressions of Nazism. These were the years when he took the greatest interest in politics.

Saint-Exupéry never was, and would probably never have claimed to be, a concrete political thinker, but in the words of Mr. Stuart Gilbert¹ 'he had a sense of responsibility, a selfless devotion to his fellow men and a burning desire to see, and to make others see, the pattern behind the confusion of our age . . .' Like most Frenchmen, he was alarmed in the Thirties by the rise of totalitarian ideologies, above all Nazism, which was threatening the very existence of his country; and even more ominous, he considered, was the apparent lack of any firm beliefs or values which could oppose these forces. Whence, he asked himself, came this lack of faith?

He seems to have had no doubt that its causes went deeper than the immediate political issues. At one moment he implied that it was due to a fundamental disunity in modern man, who had developed his intellectual powers at the expense of his spiritual

¹ See his able introduction to *The Wisdom of the Sands*.

life. 'All the calamities of the last thirty years come from two sources: the impasse created by the economic systems of the nineteenth century, and spiritual despair. . . . Why Russia? Why Spain? Men have tried out Cartesian values, but apart from science, they have not succeeded at all. There is one problem and one alone: to discover a life of the spirit—which is higher than the life of the intellect—the only one, in fact, that can satisfy man. This touches upon the problem of religious life which is a form of the spiritual life, although perhaps one necessarily leads to the other . . .'

There is a hint here of nostalgia for Christian medievalism, but what really attracted him in Christianity was the sense of community in flesh and spirit that pervades the Gospels, quite apart from any doctrine, and he sought a fusion of these spiritual impulses with the logical and scientific discoveries of the modern world. This fusion he could find in none of the modern systems, either political or religious, and so, unlike men such as Malraux and Orwell, he refused to commit himself to any of them. And as with so many people in the 'Thirties, and indeed today, he could only face the situation with the courage of despair—'*l'espoir dans le désespoir*,' as he called it.

'He shared the anguish of a whole generation of Frenchmen who clearly foresaw the coming of another World War,' said Madame Jean-Jouve, the well-known psycho-analyst, who knew him well at this time. 'But,' she continued, 'the trouble was, we felt powerless to do anything about it. We didn't trust the politicians. We had lost our faith in them and everyone else.' Madame Jean-Jouve added that Saint-Exupéry felt the frustration so acutely, partly because he was such an intense patriot. 'He identified himself to an extraordinary degree with the destiny of France,' she told us, and went on: 'This was partly bound up with his narcissistic impulses. Later on, I remember, after the outbreak of war, he gave a broadcast ending with the words: "Vive la France!" And when some of his friends

expressed surprise, Tonio was shocked by what he regarded as their lack of patriotic feeling.'

Oddly enough, his trip to Russia to report the May-Day celebrations of 1935 seems to have made hardly any impression. His articles are very little more than straight accounts of what he saw. Running through them is the image of Stalin, 'l'homme invisible,' whom he did not see, but whose presence so permeated the atmosphere that he began to believe he never really existed at all. There is a charming description of the vast crowds dancing to accordions in the Red Square before the formal May-Day parade began; their debonair happiness (one smiled at him, another offered him a cigarette) reminded him of family parties dancing in Paris suburban streets on a night of the 14th July. A journalist's scoop, which must have pleased him on this first assignment, was a flight in the *Maxim Gorki*, then the biggest aircraft in the world, the day before its crash.

In August, 1936, a month after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Saint-Exupéry left for Catalonia and the Lerida front on an assignment for *L'Intransigeant*. He flew solo into Spain in his Simoon, and passing over Perpignan where he had served six months as a test pilot in 1933, he remembered the idle provincial torpor of the evenings on sidewalk cafés. Then as he crossed the frontier his heart tightened: 'This was where men killed one another.'

In spite of the barricades of armed militiamen on the Ramblas, Barcelona at first seemed surprisingly peaceful to his civilian eyes. But on his very first night in the town he felt himself skirting the firing-line, that line which 'in a civil war . . . is invisible: it passes through the hearts of men.' He was sitting on the pavement outside a café when suddenly four armed civilians stopped and pointed their gun at the stomach of a man sitting at the next table. Ashen-grey, the man rose and slowly put his arms above his head, then shambled off down the road surrounded by the squad. 'Fascist,' hissed a woman sitting

nearby. On the table beside Saint-Exupéry stood the man's untouched glass, 'a mute witness to a mad confidence in chance, in forgiveness, in life.' He sat there, watching the vanishing back of one who 'within two feet of me, had crossed this invisible firing-line.' The incident brought home to him with a shock the horror of civil war, 'not a war, but a disease, in which men seemed to be struggling blindly, without exaltation, against infection.'

After visiting the Front he was later taken by friends on one of their mysterious expeditions into the mountain villages where the revolutionary committees, made up 'of peasants with frank eyes and sober, attentive faces,' were shooting the village notables, including the priests' housekeepers, as Fascists. Everything is relative, reflected Saint-Exupéry; when these men read in their provincial newspapers about the life of Basil Zaharoff, they transpose it into their own language, shooting, say, the local chemist because to them he is the symbol of Basil Zaharoff. 'The only one who does not understand is the chemist . . .'

There was a curious scene when Saint-Exupéry's friends had persuaded a village revolutionary committee to deliver over to them a monk who had just been hunted and shot at in the local woods. As they were about to drive off with him 'the terrible terrorists' stood round shaking hands; and the monk's they shook hardest of all, congratulating him repeatedly on being alive. 'As for me,' comments Saint-Exupéry, 'I wish I understood mankind.'

Of all the revolutionary groups he met in Catalonia, the anarchists, as might be expected, appealed most. Amongst them he again found, as he wrote to a friend, 'the emotional climate of the crews of the Line . . . the same running of risks, the same mutual co-operation, the same exalted idea of man.' But, as he went on to admit, he was drawn to any cause whose members 'consider the sharing of a crust among comrades as the highest good.'

One night, wandering about a few hours before dawn, he

was watching some trucks being unloaded in a goods-yard when, suddenly, he felt the barrels of guns pressing hard against his stomach. Unknown to him, the trucks were full of clandestine war material, and some anarchist militia had silently closed in on him, 'like the fingers of a hand.'

They hesitated, apparently, as to whether or not to shoot him at once; they were gazing, he noticed, at his tie—an unfashionable luxury in an anarchist area. Finally, still in silence, they led him off to a guard-post. He had no papers, and he could not speak any Catalan; and with a few non-committal remarks his captors handed round his camera as evidence to convict him. So bored, so automatic, seemed their actions that he found himself longing even for a sign of hostility. But every time he tried to protest in Spanish he found them gazing at him blankly, 'as if they were looking at a Chinese fish in an aquarium.' What decision had they made?

Then, as he put it, 'the miracle happened': noticing a guard smoking, he asked him, with a flicker of a smile, for a cigarette. The man slowly came to life, passed his hand across his forehead and raised his eyes, 'no longer to my tie, but to my face, and to my great astonishment also attempted a smile. The miracle did not conclude the tragedy, it removed it altogether, as light does shadow. There had been no tragedy. This miracle altered nothing visible. The feeble oil lamp, the table scattered with papers . . . everything remained unchanged. . . . The men had not moved either, but though a minute earlier they had seemed farther away from me than an antediluvian species, now they grew into contemporary life. I had an extraordinary feeling of presence. That is it: of presence!'¹

Again he had found the man behind the abstraction or the formula: the man who is all men.

Saint-Exupéry made another visit to Spain in the spring of 1937. His destination this time was Madrid. 'I went there,' he

¹ *Letter to a Hostage.*

says, 'to find out how it sometimes happens that men are willing to die.'

He travelled by car, and from Valence, where he stopped to fix up his entry permit and other essential documents, he wrote to a friend: '. . . I am not interested in seeing towns, even bombed ones, or dining in hotels and sleeping each night in a bed, nor in interviewing Generals. What I want is to be in the midst of the men who are risking their lives, that is to say, men brought face to face with all the urgent and vital problems . . .'

On his experiences during this second visit he wrote six long articles in *Paris-Soir*, three at once and three a year later. This second group of articles (published 2nd, 3rd, 4th October, 1938) is much the more interesting since in them he leavens the narrative with reflective and imaginative writing. Walking, for instance, along a trench one night in the suburb of Carabanchel, with his guide, a Republican Lieutenant, he had a glimpse of Madrid, 'white, strangely white, under the full moon'; and as the shells whistled overhead he felt he was staring, not at Madrid, but at 'the face of an obstinate virgin taking blow after blow without a moan.' Then Madrid, with its chimney-pots, its towers, its port-holes, changed to the image of a ship on the high seas, waiting for the torpedo, 'all white on the black waters of the night'; it was a ship laden with emigrants, which had 'a generation on board.'

That same evening, watching a bombardment in the city, he had seen a girl pulped into a 'blood-filled sponge' beside her 'novio.' The young man bent over the 'packet of muck,' too stunned for any reaction, and Saint-Exupéry reflected that what the youth had loved was not the lips, but their smile, not the eyes, but their glance. 'He was free to discover at last the source of the anguish love had been storing up for him, to learn that it was the unattainable he had been pursuing'; for 'what he had yearned to embrace was not the flesh . . . but the impalpable angel that inhabits the flesh.'

On the Guadalajara front he went out on patrol with a squad, consisting of an officer, a sergeant and three men, who had been ordered to find out if the enemy were hiding in a certain village. A hundred yards ahead of their own trenches they came upon a dazed sentry, half asleep in the embrasure of a stone wall. It was such a calm, untroubled night—'une nuit de cathédrale'—that Saint-Exupéry in his civilian ignorance struck a match to light a cigarette. Shots whistled over him as powerful hands ducked his head.

Then other sentries nearby joined them. 'It looks as if the lads across the way were awake,' said one. Then he cupped his hands and called: 'An-to-ni-o!' Silence. The man called again. 'Are you asleep?' But there only came the echo. 'Asleep?' the valley asked. 'Asleep?'

Another soldier, a giant peasant, took a deep breath and called out. 'An-to-ni-o. It's me! Leo!' Five seconds passed. Then: 'Ooo . . . time . . . sleep!' Soon the answer came again, but this time quite clearly: 'Quiet! Go to bed! Time to sleep!'

'Antonio! What are you fighting for?' yelled the peasant, who was standing up, exposed, in full view in the moonlight. And back came the truncated message, 'the secret mutilated by five seconds of travel across the valley as an inscription in stone is defaced by the passing of the centuries': 'Spain! You?'

And the moving reply: 'The bread of our brothers.'

Then, finally, the amazing: 'Good night, friend,' and the response, equally warm-hearted, from the other side of the valley: 'Good night, friend!' Silence again.

There was to be yet another episode which confirmed Saint-Exupéry's belief that divisions between men were superficial because at heart they sought the same ends, were fighting for the same ideals. At Carabanchel he was sitting one night in a dug-out with a captain and about a dozen soldiers, when the telephone rang. It was an order for a dawn attack on a group of twenty houses—a heavily defended enemy strong-point. The

mission meant more or less certain death for the captain and his sergeant who were to lead the assault.

The sergeant went off to get some sleep, while the others, including Saint-Exupéry, decided to remain up. They argued, joked, played chess, and passed the brandy bottle to and fro; then, just before daybreak, they aroused the sergeant. 'We sat on his bed, one of us passed an arm gently behind his neck and raised that heavy head. . . . It was the tenderest thing I've ever seen.'

'Hey, comrade!'

The sergeant made a last effort to return to his happy dreams—to reject 'our world of dynamite, exhaustion, and the icy night outside . . .' Then he stirred, woke up, and to Saint-Exupéry's amazement, smiled. Why, Saint-Exupéry wondered, did he smile when he was going out to die?

That smile, Saint-Exupéry reflected, like the arm round the sleeping head, meant a sense of brotherhood and participation. Had the sergeant complained, instead, he would have denied this unspoken feeling. 'To complain means to be still divided.' For this book-keeper from Barcelona had left his ledgers in response to some unreasoning instinctive call, like the barnyard duck fluttering its wings as it watches the flight of wild geese migrating overhead to distant lands. Now he and his comrades were facing death for each other's sake. 'At such moments one discovers a unity that no longer needs words to express it. I understand why you left Barcelona. If you were poor there, perhaps alone after work, if you had nowhere to go, here you have the sense of fulfilling yourself, of rejoining the universal . . .'

Through Saint-Exupéry's reports for *L'Intransigeant* and *Paris-Soir* there runs a note of fervent hope like that which had touched so many others in Spain: 'Perhaps mankind is giving birth to something here: perhaps something is to be born of this chaos and disruption. Although we may not realise it yet, humanity is in search of a gospel to embrace all gospels. . . . We are on the march towards a stormy Sinai.'

But a visit to Germany in the summer of 1937 confirmed the gloomier side of his predictions. The aggressive xenophobia of Nazism was evident from the moment he reached Berlin. When he landed at Tempelhof airport in his Simoon, he found the French Air Attaché waiting for him. Unknowingly he had flown over forbidden zones, and the little Simoon's errant course had been plotted all the way to the capital.

Further trouble came on his way to visit friends at Rüdesheim on the Rhine. Over Cassel, suspecting engine trouble, he circled the aerodrome, but in the end decided to go on. When he landed at Wiesbaden, a few miles from Rüdesheim, a band of about fifty youths, naked to the waist, burst out of a clump of trees. They surrounded the plane, shouting at him angrily. Then an officer appeared, but as Saint-Exupéry did not speak German, they did not understand one another. He grasped, however, from the officer's gesticulations, that on no account was he to leave the airfield, and he spent a hot and wearisome afternoon lying on the grass under the wings of his plane. Finally, along came a French-speaking official, who explained that he had been suspected of espionage and of photographing the military airfield at Cassel. Throughout the afternoon there had been a series of telephone calls between the authorities at Wiesbaden and the French Embassy in Berlin. At last, on the personal guarantee of the French Ambassador, Saint-Exupéry was allowed to leave for the civil airport of Frankfurt with a German officer on board.

A few months after his return from Germany Saint-Exupéry suddenly resolved to set off with his mechanic Prévot on another long-distance flight—this time for New York to Tierra del Fuego.

Earlier in 1937 the two men had prospected for Air France a new air route between Casablanca and Timbuctoo, and although the flight had involved crossing many thousands of miles of trackless desert, there were no mishaps. 'I am pleased

with my trip,' Saint-Exupéry wrote on his return. 'I flew straight across the sand, looking out for desert posts as though I were searching for islands in the middle of an ocean. I liked that part of the job because I had confidence in myself. I was happy when I saw a small square of ground loom out of the sand from twenty miles away, after three hundred or five hundred, or even a thousand miles of emptiness. . . . Yes, I have returned satisfied with myself and my experience. Mountain and storm and sand—those are my household deities. One contests with them on terms of equality . . .'

Now, during another fit of restlessness, Saint-Exupéry decided on the New York-Tierra del Fuego venture, although, later, realising all the difficulties entailed by such a long flight, he regretted his impulsiveness. But by then it was too late to change his mind, since he had already obtained the approval and certain facilities from the French Air Ministry. In the first days of January, 1938, he and Prévot sailed on the *Ile de France* for New York, taking the Simoon with them on board the ship.

In New York they were held up for several weeks by blizzards, but on the 15th February they left for Mexico City, intending to take the Pan-American Airways route via Panama and the west coast of South America. But in Guatemala disaster overtook them.

The fault seems this time to have been due to Prévot, who had been instructed to see that the petrol tanks were only half full, since Guatemala airport is almost five thousand feet above sea-level, and at that height there is less density of air and, consequently, less lift for take-off. But, unfortunately, he appears to have confused gallons with litres, and when they headed down the runway they were heavily overloaded for the altitude. By the time they reached the end of the of it aircraft was still racing along the ground. Saint-Exupéry jerked back the 'stick,' and the machine, after becoming airborne for a few seconds, stalled, crashed and then broke up. Prévot, who

had fainted, was hauled from the wreckage with nothing worse than a broken leg. But Saint-Exupéry, severely hurt, was taken to hospital delirious with fever; his injuries included a cranial fracture, fractures of the jaw-bone and arm, and a damaged eye, which threatened his sight. Then his wrist became infected, and it was feared at one moment it might be necessary to amputate an arm. For the first week he was in a coma.

Convalescence was slow and difficult, since his whole nervous system was badly shaken up; indeed, for long afterwards he could not stand certain noises, was subject at times to severe anxiety-states, and could not touch a cocktail or any alcohol without feeling dazed and ill. He never recovered completely from his physical injuries, and for the rest of his life remained permanently crippled in one shoulder.

Consuelo told us that she had been responsible for saving his arm. At the time of the accident she was flying from Paris to her home in Salvador, adjoining the state of Guatemala, and she had a curious presentiment that her husband was in danger. As soon as she was told of the crash, she hurried to his bedside; realising that he would rather die than lose a limb, she refused to allow the amputation and, instead, called in a doctor learned in witchcraft. She has always claimed since that Saint-Exupéry's recovery was due to magic, and he appears to have shared her view: it is yet another example of the make-believe world in which they both lived. Consuelo also thinks that her presentiment of his danger was due to a kind of telepathy which existed between them, a belief shared by some of their friends.

All his life Saint-Exupéry was interested in magic, divination, thought-transference, hypnosis and kindred subjects; he himself was an expert in hypnosis, and even as a boy had begun practising upon his sisters.

There is no doubt that he possessed some kind of 'supra-normal' powers. His ability to tell character from handwriting, for instance, seems to have been due to a genuine psychic gift.

'One evening,' writes Dr. Pélissier,¹ 'he asked me to show him a letter from either a male or a female correspondent. After examining the handwriting on the envelope he asked to see the letter and the signature. He read them quickly, then requested a sheet of paper and wrote for several minutes. The result was an exact description, both physical and mental, of my correspondent. "She is a blonde, fat woman, has a very unstable temperament, is muddle-headed and a spendthrift, and whenever she goes into town, always returns loaded with parcels . . ." Nothing in the text of the letter could possibly have given him the facts. I was flabbergasted . . .'

The card-tricks with which Saint-Exupéry used to entertain and mystify his friends appear also to have depended for their success not on fraud or sleight-of-hand but upon thought-transference, or at any rate, upon some intuitive capacity to divine from a person's temperament what card he would be likely to choose out of a pack.

This intuitive sense showed in many other ways. One Sunday afternoon, his friend Léon Werth relates, a number of people had gathered in Werth's flat overlooking the Luxembourg Gardens. Saint-Exupéry, who was gaily singing at the piano, suddenly observed through the window two West Indian half-castes walking along the street. He hailed them and invited them up. 'Either because their travels,' Werth goes on, 'had made them used to any surprise, or because they were hypnotised by Saint-Exupéry, as birds are by a snake, the two mulattos obeyed. Their manners were simple and perfect. . . . As soon as we asked them, they began singing old songs of Guadeloupe and Martinique. . . . Saint-Exupéry had adopted them by a glance, had guessed their background and foreseen the tact of their behaviour. . . . Whether he was juggling with cards out of a pack, or with two passers-by among thousands, he showed the same flair and insight into human nature.'

It was also in the company of Léon Werth that Saint-

¹ *Les Cinq Visages de Saint-Exupéry.*

Exupéry experienced one of those moments of 'illumination' which gave him a sense of deeper contact and fusion with his fellow-beings. He himself describes the occasion in *Letter to a Hostage*. It was during a beautiful summer's day in the Thirties which he and Werth decided to spend together in the country. At midday they sat down to lunch at a little inn on the banks of the Saône, and moved by the peace and enchantment of the scene, they invited two bargees to drink Pernod with them.

'We hailed them from our balcony. And they came. Perfectly naturally. It seemed so obvious to invite them because of the invisible joy within us. And they saw it so well that they immediately responded. And so we drank together. . . . The sun felt good. The poplars on the farther bank, the plain to the very horizon, were bathed in its warm honey. And we went on getting more and more cheerful without knowing why. Everything reassured us: the clear sunlight, the river flowing, the meal, the bargees for having responded, the maid who served us with a sort of consummate grace, as though in charge of some eternal feast. . . . We savoured a sort of state of perfection, in which, every wish vouchsafed, nothing remained to be revealed. We felt we were pure, upright, lambent, indulgent. We could not have said what truth was thus being manifested. But the dominant feeling was certainly that of assurance. Of an assurance almost proud.

'And so we savoured this mute understanding, this almost religious rite. Soothed by the comings and goings of the hieratic servant, we and the bargees drank like faithful adherents of the same religion, though we did not know which one it was. One of the bargees was Dutch. The other, German. He had previously fled from the Nazi regime: there he had been persecuted for being a Communist, or a Trotskyist, or a Catholic or a Jew. (I do not remember under which label that man was banished). But at that moment the bargee was something quite other than this label. What counted was the man himself: the quality of

his humanity. He was a friend, that was all. And we were agreed, between friends. You agreed, I agreed. The bargees and the maid agreed. Agreed on what? On the Pernod? On the significance of life? On the mellow sunlight? We could not have expressed it in any case. But though impossible to formulate in words, that agreement was so complete, so deep-rooted, so clearly based on a faith, that each one of us would have gladly fortified the inn, sustained a siege there, and died behind machine-guns to preserve its substance.'

Another friend, Pierre Dalloz, relates a rather similar incident when he and Saint-Exupéry were visiting the Roman town of Aigues-Mortes near Montpellier. Bored with gazing at the ruins Saint-Exupéry decided to approach a group of people playing bowls beside the ramparts. 'And,' continues Dalloz, 'the way in which Antoine, without any invitation, joined in the game was marvellous. He did so with a complete self-assurance, as though he knew he possessed some power over human beings which he was accustomed to exercise. In a flash all the differences of clothes and other social distinctions were swept away. The players were won over at once. We finished up in a small café where the proprietor's son was a painter, and ever since that sun-baked afternoon I have cherished a superb black bull painted on glass. Antoine procured it without difficulty. The café proprietor's son gave out of friendship what he would have refused to give for money.'

It was yet another example of his ability to get on with all types of people, whether they were peasants or scientists, mechanics or Arab chiefs. 'What I love,' he wrote, 'is to ennoble another human being: to give him more than I receive; to raise his drowned face above the current; to evoke in him certain sounds, certain tones of voice—or even a smile. After all, the most pathetic of all things is the imprisoned soul.'

As soon as he was well enough to travel Saint-Exupéry returned to New York, where he stayed in a friend's apartment. His

American friends made a great fuss of him, and ever in need of the love and approval of his fellow beings, he welcomed their kindness and hospitality, though he stubbornly refused to learn English. When he found himself in difficulties shopping in New York, he would ring up a friend who could speak both languages. 'Tell the assistant I want the tie in the window with the red stripe in it . . .' The Americans found it hard to pronounce his name, and a journalist gave a phonetic rendering of it for the benefit of his readers, thus: 'Ex-you-pay-ree.'

There was much about New York that appealed to the child in him. He was fascinated, for instance, by the curious electrical phenomena in the air. He would rub the soles of his feet on the floor hoping for an electric spark; or feel with delight the door handle crackle as he touched it; or turn out the lights, make his guests catch each other's hands in the dark and watch the sparks flying from the tips of their fingers.

He loved, too, all the mechanical gadgets, particularly the electric razors, then a novelty; and, above all, the dictaphones. He always kept one in his flat in Paris, and Consuelo, who showed it to us, told us he would make his friends speak or sing into it. Dr. Péliissier has also noted his delight in the most varied mechanical novelties. For instance, in Algiers he took a fancy to the doctor's 'Atmos' clock, which never had to be wound up but was kept going by variations in the temperature of the air; he was particularly enchanted by the response of its mechanism to the heat of the sun. He was not satisfied until Péliissier found him a similar one.

In spite of these delights his feelings about the American way of life were mixed. It was not its materialism but the noise, the bustle and confusion which struck him most; they seemed both to hide and to emphasise a spiritual aimlessness and purposelessness. He was reminded, he wrote, 'of the hubbub and clatter which goes on in a ship in danger of sinking. . . . All those crowds and lights and arrow-pointed buildings . . . pose in the most devastating fashion the problem of human destiny . . . I

feel more than anywhere else as though I were adrift upon the high seas.'

The American practice of liberty struck him as particularly narrow. 'There is nothing especially striking about the Babbit of today—in seeing him buy his national newspaper, from which he digests his ready-made opinions . . . choosing between three different points of view, because three are offered him; then screwing up a nut, one-seventh of a turn, eleven times a minute—his allotted task on the assembly-line; then lunching at his drug-store where rigid conditioning forbids him fulfilling the smallest individual wish. . . . No one is shocked by this frightful notion of liberty—a liberty which permits no growth or development. True liberty lies in creative activity. A fisherman is free when his own instinct guides him in his sport; the sculptor when he is hewing out of stone his own conception of a face. But it is simply a caricature of liberty I am exercising when I decide, say, between the four makes of automobiles manufactured by General Motors . . .'

In New York he met Curtis Hitchcock, a partner in the well-known publishing firm of Reynal and Hitchcock, who were to publish the American edition of his next book, *Terre des Hommes* (*Wind, Sand and Stars*). Saint-Exupéry had been working on it intermittently for some time but, still subject to fits of anxiety as a result of the Guatemala crash, he was in no frame of mind for literary work.

He returned to Europe in the spring of 1938, but moved restlessly with his manuscript from place to place, seeking in vain for peace of mind. For a time he continued his convalescence in the South of France. Then he went on to Switzerland where he spent day after day plying up and down Lake Geneva in the little steamers. He would take his manuscript with him in the hope that the leisurely motion would help him to concentrate. As soon as inspiration flagged, he got off and went for a walk along the shore.

Later he revisited his old school at Fribourg and the home of his childhood at Saint-Maurice-de-Remens. The chateau had been turned into a holiday camp, but he enjoyed staying in the lodge with the old keeper.

In early July he wrote a preface for the French edition of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *Listen, the Wind*, and in the middle of the month when he returned for a short visit to New York, he was able to take with him the first part of the corrected manuscript of his own book.

Its form had been originally suggested by André Gide, who had already proved himself a valuable literary friend and guide. Gide, writing in 1945, explained that 'after his first two novels I made bold to say to him, "Why don't you write something which is not a continuous narrative, but a sort of . . ." Here I hesitated. . . . "Well, like a sheaf, a bouquet; a grouping together, irrespective of time and place, of the sensations, emotions and reflections of the airman; something akin to what Conrad's admirable *Mirror of the Sea* is for the sailor?" Saint-Exupéry did not yet know this book when *Terre des Hommes* began to take shape in his mind; and all the passages he read me from his own book a few months later surpassed my wishes, my hopes and my expectations.'

Terres des Hommes, dedicated to 'my comrade, Henri Guillaumet,' was published in France in February, 1939, and it enjoyed an immediate popular success. Two months later Saint-Exupéry learned to his delight that it had been awarded the 'Grand Prix du Roman' of the Académie Française. He was even more pleased when the employees of a French printing house banded together to pay for a special edition of the book printed on aeroplane cloth, and he travelled down to their factory in the country to receive the gift in person.

In the United States, *Wind, Sand and Stars*, ably translated by Lewis Galantière, was chosen as the Book of the Month, and its sales were large. This American edition differs considerably

from the French, many passages being omitted from the one which are to be found in the other, and vice versa. *Wind, Sand and Stars* is by far the longer of the two books, for in order to meet American publishing requirements Saint-Exupéry added a great deal of fresh material, including two new chapters—'The Elements' and 'Barcelona and Madrid.' This latter chapter was partly re-written from articles contributed earlier to French newspapers.

During the spring of 1939 he made another last trip to Germany. Confused by all the anti-Nazi propaganda, he was anxious to see conditions for himself. In Berlin he met Otto Abetz, then in charge of Franco-German relations, who took him on a tour of the 'show-places,' including the famous Führer-school. He was also told that Goering would like to meet him, but Saint-Exupéry declined the invitation. In the middle of March, during the Czech crisis, he hastened back to France.

This last visit to Germany profoundly depressed him. 'Human respect! Human respect,' he wrote. 'There is the touchstone. When the Nazi respects only what resembles him, he respects nothing but himself. He denies the creative contradictions, ruins any hope of man's ascent and, for a thousand years, in place of man, creates an ant-hill robot. Order for order's sake deprives man of his essential power which is to transform the world and himself. Life creates order, but order does not create life.'

But in that last summer of peace he was able to spend some nostalgic days with some of his old comrades of the Line. Guillaumet, with technicians and mechanics, was testing out a new seaplane for transatlantic service at Biscarosse near Bordeaux. Saint-Exupéry stayed for a time with them at Guillaumet's invitation, in that atmosphere of experimental flying—practical yet imaginative—which he loved. At the end of May Guillaumet had a thirty-seventh birthday party, and

both he and Saint-Exupéry nearly broke down in tears as they recalled old days.

In early July Saint-Exupéry rejoined his old friend at Biscarosse for an attempt on the North Atlantic speed record. When they reached New York he found huge photographs of himself in the bookshops above piled-up copies of *Wind, Sand and Stars*, but during the few days in between flights that he spent there he avoided his literary friends and lived entirely with the crew of the seaplane. On the flight back it established a new record for the Atlantic crossing of twenty-eight hours, twenty-three minutes.

This interlude put him into good spirits, which survived a return visit to New York, made a fortnight later at the request of his publishers. Half of August was passed in the flurried glamour of being continuously photographed, signing luxury editions and talking on the wireless. But by the middle of the month, disquieted by the news from Europe, he shut himself up in his room at the Ritz-Carlton, read newspaper after newspaper, and telephoned constantly to France. A few days later he got a passage back on the *Ile de France*. He reached Le Havre a week before war was declared.

CHAPTER X

FLIGHT TO ARRAS

The Second World War was one of the turning-points in Saint-Exupéry's life. It was to prove as crucial and decisive for his development as when, thirteen years earlier, he had thrown in his lot with the Line and discovered the world of flying and the friendship and creative leadership of Daurat. For it gave him, as to so many other men, wider opportunities of self-realisation; he identified himself with his country, sharing its ordeal and, later, the agony and humiliation of its defeat. Suffering brought an enrichment, a deepening, of his whole character and outlook, the evidence for which lies in *Flight to Arras*—the book which was to establish him as the spokesman of his countrymen in their hour of trial.

From the beginning Saint-Exupéry held no illusions about the war. He deplored the apathy, defeatism and lack of moral vigour which afflicted many classes and sections of Frenchmen, but he understood their widespread feeling of apprehension. 'What can an agricultural nation of forty millions do against an industrialised nation of eighty millions?' he asked. He was even more pessimistic about the long-term future. 'Of course we must fight,' he declared, 'but it is going to be a hundred years' war. The fundamental issues at stake have never been touched upon at all, and consequently the war will go on, interrupted only by the temporary exhaustion of one of the combatants.'

His attitude towards war in general was summed up in *Flight to Arras*. 'War is not a true adventure. It is a mere ersatz. Where ties are established, where problems are set, where creation is stimulated—there you have adventure. But there is no adventure in heads-or-tails, in betting whether the toss will

come out life or death. War is not an adventure. It is a disease. It is like typhus . . .'

On returning from America Saint-Exupéry learned to his dismay that he was posted to a French Air Force Station at Toulouse for duties as a flying instructor. He considered that he had quite a different role to play; he was determined not to be cheated out of it. After a month of wearisome routine duties at Toulouse, he wrote, almost hysterically, to a friend:

I implore you with all my strength to persuade Chassin to get me on to fighters. I suffocate more and more. The atmosphere of this place is unbreathable. . . . If I cannot get into action, I shall suffer a moral breakdown. I feel I have got a lot to say about things; and I can only express myself as an active combatant and not as an onlooker. . . . Here they want to make me an instructor, both in navigation and as a pilot on heavy bombers. . . . Save me. You know I have no taste for war, but it is impossible to remain in the background and not to take a share of the risks . . .

It is a terrific sophistry to pretend that people should be relegated to a safe spot because they 'have a value.' It is only when one plays a part in things that one becomes truly effective. If those who 'have a value' are the salt of the earth, then let them mingle with the earth; one cannot say 'we' if one cuts oneself off—or, if one does say 'we' in those circumstances, one is a swine! All that I love is threatened. . . . In Provence, when there is a forest fire, every man who is not a swine grasps a pick-axe and a bucket. I must join in, not through any love of it, but through a feeling of inner vocation (*par religion intérieure*). I cannot evade the challenge. Get me as quickly as possible into a fighter squadron.

Once he had set his heart on a thing Saint-Exupéry always pursued it with unrelenting obstinacy. At first he was rejected as medically unfit for combat duties, both on grounds of age and because of the injury to his arm in the Guatemala crash; but he pestered influential friends by letter and telephone and even went to Paris himself to press his claims.

This time, he found, his friends were reluctant to help him; they did not wish him to risk his life in old military planes which, compared with the new Messerschmidts, were hopelessly out of date. They even suggested he should take a job under Jean Giroudoux in the Ministry of Information, where his prestige and talents would be invaluable. He turned it down, remarking that he did not wish to become one of those intellectuals, 'kept in reserve on the shelves of the Ministry like pots of jam to be eaten after the War.'

In the end his obstinacy gained the day. On the 3rd November, 1939, through the aid of a high-ranking Army officer, General Davet, he was posted in the rank of captain to an Air Reconnaissance Group, known as 2-33. Group 2-33, which consisted of two Squadrons, was attached directly to the French High Command, and it was stationed in the little village of Orcante, near St. Dizier, about 150 miles due east of Paris. During the ensuing months it was engaged on regular reconnaissance over Aix-la-Chapelle, Cologne, Coblenz and other towns of the Rhineland.

What sort of an impression did Saint-Exupéry make on his fellow-airmen? We put the question to General Gelée, now a distinguished officer in the French Air Ministry, then serving as a junior pilot in Group 2-33. 'We were proud yet a little apprehensive when we heard he was coming to us,' said Gelée. 'For by then he was quite an illustrious figure. But our fears proved groundless. What impressed us most about him was his humility. As you know, there had been a conspiracy amongst his friends to get him a safe job, and he was almost pathetically grateful to be accepted in a fighting unit. He had a horror of being cut off from the fighting man. Far from expecting any special privileges, he seemed actually to enjoy discipline; he always liked to think of himself as the "corporal-pilot."'

General Gelée was particularly struck by Saint-Exupéry's

hatred of pretentiousness: 'I remember once he took me to see a certain lady-novelist in Paris, and afterwards he was terribly upset by the affected manner in which she received us. He loathed affectation and shallowness, and even mere worldly polish—"le vernis," as he termed it; he only respected what he called "les sentiments réels," whether they were those of a peasant-woman with her child, or of a scientist talking about his work.'

Although General Gelée had a poor opinion of Saint-Exupéry as a pilot, he was struck by his keenness. 'Our reconnaissance work was arduous,' he said. 'For one thing it involved rapid alterations of temperature, which must have been hard for a man of his age. At one moment we would be sweating on the ground in our heavy flying-kit; a few minutes later, at operational heights of twenty-five or thirty thousand feet, we felt stiff with cold. But Saint-Exupéry thought nothing of the discomfort and risks. He only made a fuss if he felt he was being cheated of his fair share of flights. In the air he was always gay and even hilarious, but sometimes in the Mess he would fall into a moody silence, and then the only thing to do was to leave him alone.'

Despite these solitary, and even depressed moments, it is clear from *Flight to Arras* how much he valued the gay, spontaneous comradeship of the Group. Its Commander was Commandant Alias, whom Saint-Exupéry saw as a sensitive leader of the type of Daurat, forced by the exigencies of war to suppress his human qualities. There was also Hochedé, a man of invincible courage, who had risen from the ranks. 'He made a total gift of himself to the war,' wrote Saint-Exupéry. 'More, probably, than any of us, Hochedé dwells permanently in that state which I have striven so hard to reach. . . . When I think of Hochedé I reproach myself with all my pettinesses, my negligences, my laziness, and my moments of intellectualism, that is to say, scepticism.' Among the others there was a young

Jewish pilot, Lieutenant Israel, who 'had heard so much of Jewish craftiness that he probably mistook his courage for a form of craftiness.' And there was Lieutenant Bougerol, who turned out to be a Franciscan friar, as was only discovered at a critical moment in the retreat, when he said Mass in the operations room at Le Bourget. Not knowing this, Saint-Exupéry had spent many hours with him in the Mess discussing religion and philosophy.

Throughout the winter and early spring of 1939-40 flying was uneventful, and by the end of April no more than half a dozen airmen of the Group had been lost in action. During this 'phoney' war period Saint-Exupéry was appalled by the inefficiency apparent in both the administrative and military machines, as well as in the workshops and factories. 'Ineffectiveness,' he wrote in *Flight to Arras*, 'weighed us all down, all of us in the uniform of France, like a sort of doom. It hung over the infantry that stood with fixed bayonets in the face of German tanks. It lay upon the air-crews that fought one against ten. It afflicted those very men whose job it should have been to see that our guns and controls did not freeze and jam . . .'

On leave in Paris he would impress upon generals and politicians the need to hasten the deliveries of modern aircraft and equipment. In the first months of the war the French were flying obsolescent Potez 63's which were no match for the new German fighters and fighter-bombers. At high altitudes the guns, and even the throttle and other flying controls, would freeze up. Whether or not due to Saint-Exupéry's efforts, the Potez were later replaced by Bloch 174's. These were much faster and better machines, and when they reached the squadrons there was both relief and jubilation; the pilots vied with each other for the privilege of flying them from the factory.

Stimulated by the national danger Saint-Exupéry also turned his inventive mind to some of the aeronautical problems which he felt were not being tackled with sufficient energy. On one of his visits to Paris he went to the Institut du Froid at Meudon

and encouraged the experts there to produce a new type of oil which would not freeze at high altitudes; but experiments with this oil in the air did not come up to expectations. He was also one of the first to realise the possibilities of luminous camouflage as a means of confusing enemy pilots at night.

Even more striking, considering he was not a trained scientist, was his interest in the use of electro-magnetic waves as a navigational aid. At a time when radar was still in the relatively experimental stage he invented a position-finding instrument on the radar principle which could be installed in aircraft; types similar to it were widely used later on by the R.A.F. bomber-crews. Saint-Exupéry's invention actually reached the stage of prototype manufacture, but before it could be properly tested out the Germans had invaded France. The same fate befell his camouflage ideas which had been favourably reported upon by the Military Commission dealing with this subject.

On the 10th of May, 1940, Saint-Exupéry was on twenty-four hours' leave in Paris. At four o'clock that morning he was rung up by a friend who informed him that the Germans had crossed the Belgian and Dutch frontiers. He hastened back to his unit.

A few days later when he visited Paris again, he was horrified by the atmosphere of irresponsibility which he found there. He saw Paul Reynaud, the Prime Minister, to whom he suggested that he should be sent at once to the United States to persuade President Roosevelt to release American aircraft for the help of France. But the Prime Minister had already arranged for René de Chambrun, who was well-known in American circles, to go there. General Gelée remembers Saint-Exupéry remarking on his return from Paris: 'I can't make anything of all this confusion, but there's one thing I *am* certain of: my place from now onwards is by your side.'

'It required,' went on Gelée, 'not so much physical as tremendous moral courage to carry on when we knew that France was on the eve of defeat. We had to move rapidly,

changing our base almost every day, and retreating further and further into central France. On the 20th of May we fell back on Le Bourget, where we heard on the wireless of the defection of Belgium. After this announcement the Marseillaise was played. The whole squadron rose spontaneously to attention and saluted. It was a dramatic moment.'

As the French Forces disintegrated, Saint-Exupéry found the war taking on a quality almost of absurdity. 'It was as if you were dashing glassfuls of water into a forest fire in the hope of putting it out.' The advance was so rapid that the first news of enemy positions was apt to be the arrival of the enemy themselves, and the Allied planes scattered between Alsace and Dunkirk were so few in number that when a plane roared over the French lines it was virtually certain to be German. From the air he watched with horror the stream of refugees—'interminable syrup flowing endlessly to the horizon.' These refugees in their mounting panic even objected to the presence of the army because, in trying to move up to the battle areas, it blocked the roads and drew the enemy's fire.

In all this chaos the Group continued to fly. But as co-ordination between the general staffs and the reconnaissance units had broken down their efforts were virtually useless. When Major Alias carefully interrogated the returned pilots and observers about train movements they had seen behind the lines, it was mainly with the object of sustaining morale.

The sacrifice of crews was heavy. 'Our Group,' wrote Saint-Exupéry, 'melted like a lump of wax.' By the time of the capitulation, seventeen crews, each consisting of a pilot, observer and gunner, had been lost out of a total of twenty-three.

It was in this atmosphere that he carried out on the 23rd of May the flight over Arras which gave him the first idea for his novel. He took off from Orly, and before reaching Arras ran into storms, losing the fighter escort; and close to the target heavy machine-gun fire pierced his oil tank.

That night he dined at a bistro near the Porte Maillot. He had heard that a close friend, Jean Schneider, had been shot down in the fighter escort, and was in a strange, overwrought state of mind, describing excitedly to his host the flames over Arras. Like most pilots who at one moment found themselves over enemy territory and at the next carrying on their ordinary lives, he was, doubtless, unnerved by the sharp and extraordinary contrast.

Anxious for his safety (at that time the chances of survival were about one in three), his friends tried repeatedly to get him a transfer. But each time he managed to outwit them. For his bravery in this and other missions he received a citation on the 2nd June. 'An officer uniting the best intellectual and moral qualities, he has constantly volunteered for the most dangerous missions. . . . He is for the personnel of the unit a model of duty and the spirit of sacrifice.'

On the evening of the 11th June Saint-Exupéry had a dinner engagement with friends at a restaurant in Paris. He arrived at ten o'clock. 'You must leave,' he cried. 'Paris is lost. Au revoir.' He did not stop to eat, but drove off into the black-out to rejoin the Group, which was making its way south to Bordeaux. The night of the 13th of June was spent in Tours, where for the first time he saw Ministers and other important officials in flight.

At Bordeaux the confusion was overwhelming. Cars were stacked side by side down every street; crowds swirled round the British Consulate and temporary Embassy trying to get places on the last boat for England; and at the elegant restaurant, 'Le Chapon Fin,' Saint-Exupéry watched with disgust the eminent of France and their mistresses playing drawing-room politics while their country was in defeat.

It was a relief when, on the 17th of June, the order came for part of the Group, including all the officers, to move to Algiers. There were not enough aircraft to transport them, and Saint-Exupéry and two other pilots went down to

Bordeaux aerodrome where each of them seized a plane. Saint-Exupéry took the largest, a four-engined Farman, filled it with all the Air Force personnel he could muster and a few civilians, and flew it to Maison-Blanche aerodrome at Algiers.

That night his old friend, Dr. Pélissier, visited him in his hotel. Lying on his bed, Saint-Exupéry talked almost hysterically of the disaster of France—of the evacuation, 'a prodigious exodus towards nothing,' of the burning villages, the despair, the ruin and death; and he dwelt on his terror of the Hitler mystique and of the new era, lasting a thousand years, which was to be based on it. He continued to talk till exhaustion finally overtook him, and his friend was still sitting by the bed when he fell asleep.

The hotel at which he was staying, the Aletti, was already the centre of political intrigue. The disputes between future collaborators and Gaullists bewildered and disgusted Saint-Exupéry even more than those of the tea-time diplomats at Bordeaux. A symptom of his confusion was that, whenever a political argument was put to him, he would offer to expound it better; and he was so sickened by the contradictory rumours and opinions that he refused to take up any positive stand of his own. Few, let alone the idealistic Saint-Exupéry, were equipped to face that atmosphere of moral squalor.

It was General Corniglion-Molinier, later to become Head of the French Air Force in England under de Gaulle, who told us something of what happened to Saint-Exupéry during those unhappy days of divided loyalties. 'Saint-Exupéry and I had decided to escape to England in the Farman aircraft,' said General Corniglion-Molinier. 'But Darlan ordered his sailors to dismantle it—to remove the wheels and "props." However, during the night we replaced them, and, believe me, we really sweated over the job! But Darlan outwitted us. Next day we found a guard of Senegalese soldiers round the plane, and we could not get near it again.'

Saint-Exupéry's demobilisation, fortunately, was not long delayed. At the end of July the survivors of Group 2-33 offered him a farewell dinner at an oasis outside Algiers. After they had sung the ribald old songs of the Mess the time came for toasts, and Major Alias made a short, but heartfelt, speech. 'Now that Saint-Ex. is leaving us,' he concluded, 'Group 2-33 will lose its soul.'

On the 5th of August Saint-Exupéry sailed for France, landing at Marseilles on the following day. He went straight to his sister's house at Agay, and there he settled for a time, trying to begin work on a new book—the posthumously-published *Citadelle* (*The Wisdom of the Sands*). But his mind was still tortured by the events of the last months, and soon his health began to give way under the strain. It was then that he decided to go to the United States.

This meant a visit to Vichy to get a passport and an exit-permit, and to Paris to retrieve certain papers and manuscripts he had left there. In the hotel at Vichy he ran into a friend, Drieu la Rochelle, who offered to drive him to Paris. When they reached the demarcation-line at Moulins, Saint-Exupéry was surprised and upset to find Drieu presenting a *laissez-passer* to the German guards, who immediately opened the barrier for their car. It was his first experience of friendly relations between French and Germans.

In Paris Drieu arranged an interview for him with a high German official to discuss permits, but Saint-Exupéry, still openly resentful, answered the German in monosyllables. That night at 10 o'clock he left the interrogation, and on reaching the Métro at the Rond-Point des Champs-Élysées found the gate closed. He then realised that as a civilian found in the street after curfew he was liable to imprisonment, and he was panic-stricken at the thought that the Germans might lay hands on his precious papers. Though normally slow and cumbrous of movement, he ran up the whole length of the Avenue Président Wilson, shouting ridiculously to himself:

'They shan't have my manuscripts.' And finally, when he reached a friend's apartment, his clothes were in disorder and his feet covered with blisters. Realising later the absurdity of his behaviour he began to laugh: 'I'm not made to live in an enemy country . . . I'm done for if I don't get off to America.'

Next day he left for the unoccupied zone on the first stage of his journey to New York. An unexpected difficulty then came up. He had intended sailing from Lisbon, but the Spaniards refused him a transit-visa because of 'the help he had given Red Spain at the time of the Civil War.' After considerable delays he at last succeeded in reaching Lisbon by sea via Tangier.

In Portugal, growing lonely and homesick, he began to doubt the wisdom of his decision to leave. At Estoril, where he watched the rich refugees arriving to gamble at the Casino in their Cadillacs and furs, he felt 'the same uneasiness which disturbs one at the zoo, when confronted by the survivors of an extinct species'; even more disturbing was the rootlessness of these people who, having shed their ties and responsibilities, had lost their meaning, their 'density.' He even noticed that the hotel staffs treated them with a curious disregard, 'as if they were serving the dead.' In this unhappy state of mind he wired and telephoned incessantly to France, clutching at the straws of his vanishing security. This further depleted his slender stock of escudos.

Then came a deep blow in the death of his old friend Guillaumet. Guillaumet had been flying the new French High Commissioner, Chiappe, to Syria in a transport plane; above the Gulf of Tunis he became involved in an air-battle between British and Italians, and the plane was shot down—by which side will never be known. To Saint-Exupéry Guillaumet represented so much in his own past, and the snapping of this link almost made him head back for France at once. 'It seems to me,' he wrote in a letter, 'that I have no friends left. I do not mourn him—I have never been able to mourn the dead—but

I am about the only one who now remains amongst the crews who flew with the Line in the old days . . . ' He concluded the desperate letter: 'Tell me if I should return, and I will.'

But he had gone too far now to change his plans, though a few days before sailing for New York he gave a commemorative lecture on Guillaumet at the École Française in Lisbon. He spoke with such intense fervour of his comrades of the Line and of the clean, unsullied simplicity of their days in the desert that according to the Portuguese Press, the audience was 'fremente d'emoção.'

It is difficult to trace the complicated, often unconscious, motives which impel the artist, particularly when that artist is also a man of action. The phase of action in Saint-Exupéry's life was temporarily over; certainly, now, he wanted to write. And yet had he decided, instead of going to America, to join the Free French Forces in England, he would have found here a spirit of unity which was particularly in tune with his nature. It was a spirit very different from that which he left behind—or, for that matter, from that which he was to find among his compatriots in New York.

He went first of all to the Ritz-Carlton from where, on the day of his arrival, he rang up one or two old friends. His voice on the telephone sounded so gloomy that they hurried round to see him. They found him a changed man, sick in mind and body after the turmoil of the last year.

Unable to settle down or to find any solace in his work, he foolishly allowed himself to become embroiled in controversies with the various French factions. These were divided into three main groups: the Pétainists, headed by M. Henri Haye, the Vichyite Ambassador; the Gaullists, known under the name of France Forever, who were trying to canalise all the channels of effective resistance; and, thirdly, a group of independents, mostly influential writers or journalists, such as Kérillis, Geneviève Tabouis and Jacques Maritain. Saint-Exupéry was

soon involved with all three groups in various unexpected and disagreeable ways.

The trouble started when he found that he had been appointed an honorary Councillor of State by Marshal Pétain from Vichy. The nomination came as a complete surprise and, as it had already been publicly announced, the only course open to him was to make an equally public refutation through the wireless and newspapers. This he did. But meanwhile a rumour, presumably started amongst the French emigrés, began to circulate in New York that this public repudiation had been made without his knowledge and that only later had he agreed to it—and then very unwillingly. In a curt letter to one of his detractors he gave chapter and verse, dates, names and places, showing how and when he had made the refutation.

This rumour was then followed by another, spread by a member of France Forever, that he was a Nazi agent in German pay. Although this seems to have been inspired largely by malice, it was an indication of the Gaullists' attitude towards him. From the beginning he had refused to join them, explaining that he disliked many of them personally and resented their attitude of having 'a monopoly of patriotism.' 'Super-patriots' he also called them; he was, for instance, particularly irritated by the remark of one of them that, had she any children in France, she would be proud if they died of hunger so long as England survived. This woman, commented Saint-Exupéry acidly, could afford to be so glib because she was childless.

Such remarks were particularly irritating because, unlike him, most of the French in New York had never seen any action at all; and until the publication of *Flight to Arras*, the only book available to the great American public about recent events in France was *À Travers le Désastre*, whose author, Jacques Maritain, had been in America throughout the collapse and the occupation. Saint-Exupéry vented his exasperation by lumping the Gaullists together with the Independents as examples of what he despised—'la Résistance de la Cinquième Avenue'

(the Resistance of Fifth Avenue). His refusal, admittedly unjustified, to join the Gaullists was never forgiven, and it caused him many difficulties later on in Algiers.

With the Americans his relations were a great deal more friendly. But he was perturbed by their isolationism and what he considered their failure to grasp the problems of Europe; and their judgments on France in casual conversation, and particularly the Press attacks on French decadence ('France no longer exists,' announced one commentator dramatically), horrified him by their ignorance of the real condition and spirit of his country. He was also angered by their easy optimistic view that Hitler would be defeated in the end. Having seen his country go down before the might of the German war machine, he felt no such happy assurance; and it seemed more courageous to express his doubts than shelter behind false hopes. Longing for full American participation in the war, he yet wondered anxiously how it could ever be brought about. Pearl Harbour was still only the name of a naval port in the Pacific.

All these various tensions increased his state of nerves and, according to a French friend in New York, Pierre de Lanux, made him subject to swift changes of mood. He would suddenly become aggressively dogmatic in conversation, lose his temper and allow himself to be carried away by gusts of rage. But the storm would be followed by a mood of contrition. 'I am a nice person, really, aren't I?' he would say, joking with a charm that was irresistible.

In a letter to Dr. Pélissier he summed up his feelings: 'I have no very high opinion of physical bravery; but life has taught me that there is a real courage in standing up to blame and condemnation. I know that I have been more courageous in not deviating from the road set by my conscience, in spite of two years of insults and defamation, than when photographing Mainz or Essen.'

In the spring of 1941, hoping to escape for a time the squabbles of his countrymen, he went to California. The strain had

brought on an old kidney trouble, for which he was operated on at the French Hospital in Los Angeles. It does not appear to have brought him any great physical relief, but it marks a change in his state of mind. He kept notebooks by his bedside at the nursing-home in which he jotted down ideas for *The Wisdom of the Sands*. The urge to write grew. On his return to New York in the early summer, he determined to tell America the truth about France as he saw it. So he began the book which was to become for the American people the first expression of the French Resistance: *Flight to Arras*.

He wrote it mostly at night in the gaudily-lit little cafés and bars of New York; and as dawn broke, he would return tired and heavy-lidded to his apartment. There he dictated his manuscript into the dictaphone, and later in the morning, while he lay in a deep slumber, his secretary would transcribe it.

He began with a narrative account of the reconnaissance flight over Arras which he had made on the 23rd May, 1940, during the French collapse. This account was interspersed with the comments, reflections and interior monologue of the pilot who narrates the story—and who is, of course, himself. But even this did not contain all he wanted to say in the way of a spiritual message, and pressed by time, he added on the metaphysical 'credo' originally intended for *The Wisdom of the Sands*, which is to be found at the end. This is somewhat out of key with the rest of the book. Otherwise the story achieves a balance between the two sides of Saint-Exupéry's nature as thinker and man of action.

Flight to Arras is a record, sincere, passionate, heart-searching, of Saint-Exupéry's own reactions to the disaster to his country which he sees, in a recurrent and developing theme fundamental to the book, as part of the deeper crisis of our times. This crisis, which he calls a spiritual one, he expounds in somewhat baffling and transcendental language which, like

most metaphysics, is open to several interpretations. In the modern world, he believed, man has lost an essential quality, described variously as a common incentive, a sense of mutual brotherhood, and what he calls the life of the spirit as opposed to the life of the intellect. These appear to be the same concept seen from different angles.

In the Middle Ages, runs his argument, men had a common focus in God. This gave them a moral incentive, as they owed a sense of allegiance to something beyond their utilitarian urges and desires; and since they also regarded themselves as children of God, parts of the Mystical Body, they felt responsible to and for one another. This strong sense of cohesion, Saint-Exupéry claimed, no longer exists today with the decline of religion under the onslaughts of science. But he was not dreaming, as we have said before, of a return to the old medieval system. He saw that the realities of the modern world must be faced.

But how was man, under modern conditions, to achieve once again this intuitive, mystical and unifying vision of life? Saint-Exupéry believed that man nowadays has developed his faculties of analysis, his powers of reason and logic, at the expense of his spiritual perceptions, and it is only these spiritual perceptions which enable him to see life as a unity. 'Man's spirit is not concerned with objects: that is the business of our analytical faculties. Man's spirit is concerned with the significance that relates objects to one another—with their totality. And this only the piercing eye of the spirit can discern . . .' In other words, man must learn to subordinate reason and logic to the superior claims of the spiritual life; and only then will he come to see again his true relationship to his fellow-men and to recognise his responsibility towards them.

The failure of responsibility is an almost obsessive theme in *Flight to Arras*. The pilot before the flight was only conscious of himself as an individual, but achieves during it a new sense of 'belonging' which is expressed in almost mystical terms. 'Until I learnt what I learnt over Arras, I could feel no responsi-

bility for this stream of refugees over which once more I fly . . . I can be bound to no man except those to whom I give. I understand no man except those to whom I am bound . . . ' And he goes on: 'True, we were already beaten . . . but I was filled with a sense of my responsibility. And what man can feel himself at the same time responsible and hopeless?'

The pilot had started out on his perilous flight in a mood of bitterness and futility, but finds his reward in the sense of participation; first with the hapless refugees, then with his Group, then with France in its defeat, and finally, in a moment of mystical illumination, with man as a whole. 'Only a few hours ago I was blind. I was bitter. But now I am able to judge more clearly. Just as I refuse to complain of other Frenchmen since now I feel myself one with France, so I am no longer able to conceive that France has the right to complain of the rest of the world. Each is responsible for all . . . '

The argument of logic and spirit is also applied to the collapse of his country. France, he avers, 'all but died of intelligence unsupported by substance'; consequently she failed in 'communion.' It was only in humiliation that she had found her soul, a humiliation that the pilot came to accept gladly, feeling that he was part of the family of France, and that to reject it would be to reject himself, leaving him to 'wander alone, filled with vainglory, just an empty shell . . . '

These conclusions about the fall of France—about the acceptance of humiliation and defeat and the essential role of sacrifice—might be considered by some as dangerously near to a Pétainist state of mind; and, as it turned out, Vichy at first enthusiastically approved of the novel. But later on they realised they had mistaken its real message.

Flight to Arras expresses a very real anxiety about the future of our civilisation, and in its concluding pages there is a hint that the only hope of achieving the 'unitive' life may be a return to the Christian religion. The pilot had come to understand 'the mystery whence was born the civilisation I claim as

my own—to bear the sins of men. . . . Each man bears the sins of all men.’ Here Saint-Exupéry comes close to the Christian conception of original sin, and later on he seems to imply that this sense of integration, of ‘belongingness,’ can only be re-awakened through the Christian idea of the mystical union of men in Christ. ‘I understand the origin of brotherhood among men. One cannot be a brother to nobody. . . . Men used to be brothers in God.’

But elsewhere in the book he suggests that man himself must take the place of God as the unifying moral force, adding that man or humanity is something born of, and yet greater than, the sum of individual men and their interests; so, to use one of his own favourite metaphors, the cathedral is something other, and greater than, the sum of its stones. ‘My civilisation is founded upon the reverence for Man present in all men. My civilisation has sought through the ages to reveal Man to men, as it might have taught us to perceive the cathedral in a mere heap of stones. . . . It is Man that is the essence of our culture.’

But whether the unifying force is to be found in God, man, humanity or a renewed sense of communal responsibility, we must achieve at this crisis of self-destruction, Saint-Exupéry affirms, a new sense of community, a new dynamic, a new fusion of individual aims into a wider whole—or go under. He would have agreed with Auden’s well-known dictum: ‘We must love one another or die.’

Whatever may be thought of its metaphysics, the narrative of *Flight to Arras* is tense and exciting. All the typical experiences of a flying-crew on a raid are skilfully conveyed. There is the nervous tension preceding the take-off, the bother of getting into all the heavy flying-clothing, the last-minute aggressive anxieties over mislaid equipment. Then, once in the air, the crew make the usual checks: they check for drift, they check their guns, they check their oxygen. Then they climb.

German fighters approach, but are shaken off. Later, the

throttle control freezes up; then they are fired upon by ground flak. Now at 2,300 feet, they are well in sight of the aircraft batteries. 'Forward of my plane I suddenly saw three lance-strokes aimed at my machine. Three long, brilliant, vertical twigs. The paths of tracer bullets fired from a small calibre gun. They were golden. Suddenly, in the blue of the evening, I had seen the spurting glow of a three-branched candlestick.'

The sense of relief on the flight back is lyrically expressed: 'Flowing beneath me at three hundred miles an hour, the earth was drawing great rectangles of wheat and alfalfa, great triangles of forest, across my windscreen. . . . The swirl of the river was as lovely in my sight as the curve of a sickle in a field.'

Flight to Arras, which was published at the beginning of 1942, was an immediate and resounding success, both in America¹ and, unexpectedly, in occupied France. There the censors allowed it to be published in its entirety, apart from four words: 'Hitler is an idiot.' The theme of resignation could indeed be taken, as we have suggested, to fit into the Pétainist mystique of moral regeneration through suffering and acceptance of the inevitable. Whole sections of the Vichy Press were enthusiastic. It was the extreme Fascist periodical *Je Suis Partout*, which raised the alarm after thousands of copies had circulated all over France.

Je Suis Partout saw that Saint-Exupéry was in fact repudiating the 'quietism' imposed by Vichy to please the Germans. He was also restating values in fundamental opposition to the opportunism of a Laval. 'It is easy to establish a society upon the foundation of rigid rules,' Saint-Exupéry had written at the end of *Flight to Arras*. 'It is easy to shape the kind of man who submits blindly, without protest, to a master, to the precepts of a Koran. The real task is to succeed in setting man free by making him master of himself.' As Roger Stéphane, then in

¹ It was listed in the *New York Herald Tribune* of 26th April, 1942, along with the current best-sellers—*Mission to Moscow* by Joseph E. Davies and *Cross Creek* by Marjorie Rawlings. In points it was given 65; while Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down* received 71 and *Dragon Seed* by Pearl Buck 61.

occupied France, remarked significantly: 'In those days Saint-Exupéry restored a meaning to our lives.'

In these Press attacks he was also accused of supporting 'international Jewish plutocracy,' because he had mentioned his old friend Léon Werth and praised highly the character of Lieutenant Israel; and the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs at Vichy added that he was surprised to find Saint-Exupéry adopting an attitude in such flagrant opposition to common sense and the 'European Line.' The book was thereupon banned on German orders, but two young students printed it clandestinely at Lyons, and one thousand copies were soon circulating from hand to hand among the Resistance. When the students were later found out, another clandestine edition was printed at Lille.

In New York both pro-Vichy Frenchmen and Gaullists joined in attacking it, the Gaullists mainly because of the picture it gave of the defeat and humiliation of France which, they considered, would cause the reader to sympathise with Vichy.

The American public, on the other hand, remained enthusiastic. This perhaps was partly because all the other great French writers who might have written on a similar theme, such as Gide, Malraux, Aragon and Eluard, were either silent or the numbers of their readers severely limited by circumstances; and so, for the time being, Saint-Exupéry was the voice of France. The book which had at first been praised by Vichy was to become an important factor in changing the whole climate of opinion towards France throughout America.

CHAPTER XI

EXILE AND RETURN

After some months in New York Saint-Exupéry, obsessed by his usual desire for heights, moved to an apartment on the twenty-first floor of a new building at Central Park South. From the balcony, as from his pent-house in Paris, he could see the stars, and as some friend remarked: 'It was just the place for an airman.'

The confusion in which he lived was the despair of servants. For years he had been apt to lose things like money or keys, or to burn clothes, sheets and napkins with his cigarettes. His sitting-room was littered with electric typewriters, razors and dictaphones; and scattered among them were various little gadgets of his own invention, including a collection of toys made out of paper and matchsticks, which gave the room the fresh, inconsequential air of a schoolboy's study.

Although he was now earning large American royalties, his financial affairs were, as usual, in chaos. Money, when he had it, always flowed out quixotically and recklessly. Some years before in Paris Guillaumet had asked his advice about dealing with a dishonest broker who had made off with 600,000 francs; it was all their savings, Mme. Guillaumet had added sadly. Whereupon Saint-Exupéry had turned to her: 'If Henri had done as I do, you'd never be in this position. Good Lord! How could I ever save 600,000 francs?'

One of his worst extravagances was his mania for telephoning ('he telephoned as often as he lit a cigarette,' said Pélissier). He would ring up friends in Montreal or even as far away as Buenos Aires, sometimes at four or five in the morning, to ask their opinion on a scientific problem, or to read aloud passages

from his manuscripts. These calls would often last for an hour or more. One morning some friends rang him up and, alarmed at the continuous engaged signal, they went along to his apartment which they eventually broke into with the aid of the police: they found him asleep with the receiver in his hand.

After the publication of *Flight to Arras*, he became once again a literary celebrity. Hostesses in New York vied with one another for the privilege of entertaining him. But he seldom accepted their invitations. New friends were made in other ways, one of them being Richard Hillary, who was introduced to him by Saint-Exupéry's friend and translator, Lewis Galantière. Hillary, at his own request, had come out to America on a propaganda tour, but when he reached Washington the Embassy felt that his scarred features would have a demoralising effect on the mothers of America; the tour had therefore been cancelled altogether. Now back in New York he was feeling, as indeed might be expected, hurt and aggrieved. In a letter to *The Times Literary Supplement* Galantière recently described the meeting between the two airmen: 'Hillary, defiant and determined not to be impressed, was captivated, and no wonder; for Saint-Exupéry had that quality so little associated with the idea of a Frenchman and yet relatively frequent among the best of them—the quality of moral fearlessness which rises above both shyness and display, and which lends to the countenance a beauty there is no resisting.' Saint-Exupéry took Hillary to his own publisher who wrote out a contract for *The Last Enemy*, which Hillary was writing at the time; he also impulsively offered to write a preface to it but, according to Galantière, did not press the matter for fear of hurting Hillary's sensitive pride.

During all this period Saint-Exupéry was acutely homesick. There were indeed times when his self-imposed exile and longing to return to France became almost unbearable. This acute nostalgia is evident in the two slight, but important, books which he wrote towards the end of his stay in America. *Letter*

to a *Hostage*, which is less than eight thousand words in length, was published in February, 1943; *The Little Prince*, which runs to about twenty thousand words, appeared two months later.

Letter to a Hostage was addressed to his old friend, Léon Werth, who was still living in France. After Saint-Exupéry's last visit to Paris during the occupation, he had stopped off on his way to Marseilles, Tangier and Lisbon to visit Werth at his home at Saint-Amour in the Jura; they had spent two days together anxiously discussing the future of France. Now, in *Letter to a Hostage*, he wrote that it was only Werth, a Frenchman, a Jew and so, an exile like himself, who could understand his feelings. 'I am so weary of polemics, exclusiveness and fanaticism. I can come to you without having to wear a uniform, without having to recite a Koran, without denying anything of my inmost world. With you I do not have to justify myself, to plead or to prove. I find peace . . .'

The book is an evocation of moods and feelings rather than any positive statement of a creed. Lisbon in late 1940; the Sahara; that day on the banks of the Saône when he and Werth had drunk with the Dutchman and the anti-Nazi refugee; the smile of the guard at Barcelona during the Civil War—these were moods and experiences which reflected the importance of that life of the spirit, that respect for the individual and for humanity, which he saw as the only hope for our civilisation. 'Respect for man! Respect for man! . . . If respect for man is founded within the hearts of men, men will eventually found in return the social, political or economic system which will consecrate this respect. Civilisation is, first of all, a blind desire in man for a certain warmth. Therefore man, from one mistake to another, finds his way to the fire.'

Letter to a Hostage ends with a picture of his old friend Werth 'dragging his fifty years through some little grocer's shop under the precarious shelter of a ragged coat, simply in order to survive another day.' Werth, seen from New York,

was a hostage, symbol of forty million other hostages, who had to be freed.

The Little Prince, which has since become one of Saint-Exupéry's most popular books, was illustrated with his own water-colour drawings but, though remarkable for imaginative-ness, they are no more than competent in execution. These drawings seem to have given him originally the idea for the story. As far back as the winter of 1939-40 he would sit in a corner of the Mess with his comrades, drawing little sketches of a child chasing butterflies. 'Why do you always draw a child and butterflies?' Hochedé once asked timidly. And Saint-Exupéry replied: 'Because it's an idea that pleases me—to chase after a dream that is realisable.' But in a copy of *Flight to Arras* which he presented to a friend in New York, there is a drawing of a child less happily engaged. It was standing on a cloud, looking down at the burning cathedral of Arras with an expression of puzzled dismay. Someone suggested that the child should be made to reveal his thoughts. 'No, not his thoughts,' Saint-Exupéry replied. 'They are too melancholy.' But later he changed his mind.

The story is told in the form of a philosophical tale or an allegorical 'conte' like Voltaire's *Candide* although, like *Gulliver's Travels*, it can be read as a children's story. The plot is simple. After a forced landing in the desert an aviator meets the little prince, who has left his asteroid (or minor planet) to explore the earth, and he describes to the aviator his journey and adventures on the way here. He has met all manner of strange folk: the business-man, grasping, possessive and unproductive; the lamplighter condemned to the mechanical job of forever lighting and extinguishing lamps while his planet revolves faster and faster so that his job becomes progressively more useless; the tippler caught up in the vicious circle of his own hallucinations and despair. This allegory, it is clear, is partly an attack on what he most disliked in the American way of life.

An obvious example of this is the little prince's encounter with the merchant:

"Good morning," said the little prince.

"Good morning," said the merchant.

"This was the merchant who sold pills that had been invented to quench thirst. You need only swallow one pill a week, and you would feel no need of anything to drink.

"Why are you selling those?" asked the little prince.

"Because they save a tremendous amount of time," said the merchant. "Computations have been made by experts, and with these pills you save fifty-three minutes in every week."

"And what do I do with those fifty-three minutes?"

"Anything you like . . ."

"As for me," said the little prince to himself, 'if I had fifty-three minutes to spend as I liked, I should walk at my leisure towards a spring of fresh water.'"

The story is full of this charm, wit and fantasy. But underlying it is a note of sadness. The little prince is, of course, largely Saint-Exupéry himself, while there is a thread of personal symbolism—the prickly rose whom the little prince has tended and left on his asteroid is said, for instance, to be a symbol of Consuelo. Both Saint-Exupéry and the little prince feel isolated and at loggerheads with the world, a world of 'grandes personnes' who have lost the secret of life. 'That secret is very simple. It is only the heart that can see rightly. . . . The essential is invisible to the eye.'

By the beginning of 1942 Saint-Exupéry's homesickness had become so desperate that he suddenly conceived a strange fantasy. He decided to build a submarine craft which would carry him back across the Atlantic; it was to be shaped like a fish with pliable fins to supply the propulsion. Although he talked about the contraption jokingly to his friends, he was for a time in deadly earnest about it, working out complex mathematical calculations and consulting engineers about the

problem of the air intake. This he eventually solved. But the scheme was later abandoned because, he said, of the problem of victualling the craft for a voyage of quite unpredictable duration.

As the war situation improved, he turned his mind to other, and more practical, issues. He began brooding over an idea to land Allied troops in French Morocco or Algeria, where he felt his knowledge and contacts would be especially useful; and such a plan would also open up the prospect, which was very dear to him, of uniting Frenchmen everywhere.

He discussed it enthusiastically with Galantière, who had important contacts in the Office of Strategic Services in Washington; and in the summer of 1942 Galantière went to Washington to see a general on the Staff. The officer replied coldly that the plan was totally impracticable, adding that Saint-Exupéry might be a poetic, but certainly was not a military genius. This apparent obtuseness and indifference startled and angered both Galantière and Saint-Exupéry.

But unknown to them, the combined Chiefs of Staff, after long hesitation, had just given the order to go ahead with Operation Torch—the code-word for the American invasion of North Africa. The landing of American troops and the capture of Algiers on the 8th November took Saint-Exupéry completely by surprise. In high excitement, he dashed off a long article—a manifesto to all Frenchmen. A translation of it appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* on 29th November; next day the original was published in *Le Canada* of Montreal. Thereafter it was reproduced everywhere in the Press and read over all the wireless networks broadcasting to France.

The essence of the manifesto was an appeal to his countrymen to drop all their quarrels about 'honour, power, justice and priority' and unite in taking up arms. But the appeal met with unexpected opposition from some of the French in America. Of these Jacques Maritain made himself the spokesman. In an article in *Pour la Victoire* (later *France-Amerique*) he

praised Saint-Exupéry's intentions, but objected strongly to his remarks about the pointlessness of political discussion among the exiles and his call to Frenchmen to serve under any organisation that was ready to fight the Germans. This, Maritain considered, meant Saint-Exupéry was prepared to condone traitors and Vichyites. Like all appeals for unity, Saint-Exupéry's laid itself open to attack as being either too broad, or, by implication, too partisan.

News now reached him that his old Group, 2-33, were re-forming in North Africa under American aegis, and, of course, he became impatient to rejoin them. But his civilian status made it difficult for him to obtain a passage. He lobbied, pulled strings, badgered friends. Finally, in the middle of March 1943, he succeeded in obtaining a berth on a convoy leaving for North Africa at the end of the month. As it happened, he was the first civilian to be taken there on board these military convoys.

There is a charming story told of Saint-Exupéry on the voyage. This coincided with one of the peak periods of German submarine activity, and several weeks were spent crossing the Atlantic, which caused more than the usual amount of convoy rumours and speculations. What would be their eventual destination? The problem was at last solved correctly by Saint-Exupéry with the aid of a little star-gazing, a protractor and some chewing-gum. This ingeniousness was very characteristic of him: his quick, effervescent, puckish mind was always alighting on these schoolboy 'wheezes.'

By the time he reached Algiers on the 4th of May, the situation in North Africa had been radically transformed. The 8th Army had already crossed the Mareth Line, and three days after his arrival, on the 7th of May, Tunis and Bizerta fell. More impatient than ever for action, he spent his few days' visit to Dr. Pélissier in Algiers arranging to rejoin his comrades.

The first squadron of the Group was stationed at Oujda on

the Algerian-Moroccan frontier, and owing to the intervention of Colonel Elliot Roosevelt, the President's son, then serving with the United States Air Force, it had recently been equipped with Lockheed Lightnings (P.38's, as the Americans called them), then the newest and fastest aircraft in the world. The other squadron was at the aircrew depot at Laghouat, an oasis in the desert two hundred miles south of Algiers, training desultorily on old Bloch machines. It was there that Saint-Exupéry was at first sent. Depots are seldom happy places, and according to the airman and writer, Jules Roy, who was at Laghouat at the time,¹ there was an atmosphere of gloom and frustration amongst the French airmen as they hung about this remote, fetid oasis, occasionally taking up an old plane on its last lease of life, and speculating uneasily as to their future.

Roy relates that late one night, as he was lying in bed in the dark, there came from the next room the sound of 'a heavy muffled voice which made me tremble. I had heard it two years before. My companion opened his suitcase, ran the water in the basin and then sat down on the bed, which groaned under his weight. He struck a match and the thickly sweet smell of American tobacco came through the cracks in the thin partition. . . . From that moment I began to hope.' Saint-Exupéry's arrival made a deep impression, even reviving the morale of the mechanics and fitters who had never read his books, but who had heard his call for unity, broadcast from America. Now his presence among them gave it a new reality.

Next morning when he made his first flight he and Roy met. 'Everything about him was bizarre: his name of a knight of the Holy Grail, his face, his body, his bearing which was both heavy and ill at ease on this planet, the impression he gave me of being a hunted man; even at times of having lost all sense of reality, as, for instance, when he looked for his bedroom door

¹ Jules Roy is the author of a charming memoir of Saint-Exupéry, *Passion de Saint-Exupéry*, and also of an excellent novel about French bomber-crews in England *La Vallée Heureuse* (The Happy Valley).

on the wrong wall. He was got up in strange clothes, a mixture of civilian and Air France dress, but which bore little resemblance to the uniform of the Air Force; his rosette of the Légion d'Honneur was upside down on its ribbon, the palm of his Croix de Guerre falling apart; while his cap, which he must have ordered from an American tailor before embarking, always looked as if it were about to fall into three separate and entirely distinct pieces: the badge with its gold braid, the peak and the crown.' He had never taken great pains about his dress, but his negligence throughout this last period of his life was particularly noticeable. He would forget to have his clothes washed or mended; and once, when suddenly he had to go out to a formal dinner, his shirt was so tattered that his friends had to pin it together hastily with paper-clips.

Saint-Exupéry was soon yearning to fly the Lightnings which had been handed over to the other squadron at Oujda. But first it would be necessary to win over the Americans: the average flying age for a Lightning pilot was 20-25, while 35 was considered the maximum—and he was now 43. He applied for a posting to Oujda, and while awaiting the result, resolved to visit some of his old friends, including André Gide, who had recently been liberated in Tunis.

But deciding at the last moment that the weather was too bad in the direction of Tunis, he flew instead to Algiers by way of Bou-Saada. That morning Roy had helped him into the old plane, a Bloch 175, carefully tucking in beside him a case containing the precious manuscript of *Citadelle*. As he sat in the cockpit with the engines running, his face seemed to Roy suddenly to shed its earthly preoccupations, taking on something of the light, transparent quality of the air. The whole squadron had lined up on the fringe of the airstrip, partly to bid him farewell, partly out of curiosity to see the take-off. To their relief he got safely off the ground.

Some minutes later Roy, saddened by his departure, decided to rejoin him for lunch at Bou-Saada. He leapt into a Simoon,

but on reaching Bou-Saada he saw from the air a Bloch lying on the airstrip with a smashed undercarriage; it was Saint-Exupéry's. He, meanwhile, had taken off again for Algiers in another plane. This was the first of his accidents at this period—the accidents of a man prematurely tired, unsure of his physical reactions, but pathetically determined to carry on to the last.

At Oujda, where he was posted at the end of May, reality did not come up to expectations, and he fell into one of his moods of despondency, doubtless partly due to a nagging fear of not being up to the job. For a man of his age it was an intense nervous strain flying Lightnings, mainly because of their high landing speeds; the pilot also had to carry out no less than thirty-two different checks before starting up his engines, eight during warm-up, and eleven before take-off.

'I've just had a few flights on a P.38,' he wrote at the beginning of June. 'It's a fine machine. I should be happy to have had this as a present at the age of twenty, but I acknowledge with some gloom that today, at the age of 43, after 6,500 hours of flying in all the skies of the world, I can't find very much pleasure in the game. It's a way of getting around—that is all. And if I submit myself to this speed and altitude at a patriarchal age for the job, it's more so as not to escape any of the cares and vexations of my generation than from any hope of finding the satisfactions of the past.' It must indeed have been particularly embittering, now that he had almost achieved the action he longed for, to be faced with the unwelcome realities of middle-age and failing powers.

After the years of independence in New York, the inconveniences of military life such as the lack of privacy or sympathetic company, also irked him. 'I live here in a complete desert,' he wrote to Dr. Péliissier. 'A camp. Three to a room (this gregarious life is the heaviest sacrifice in the world for me).' The Squadron was directly under the Americans, and he hated

hated the queueing-up for breakfast with billy-cans, the meals gobbled in ten minutes standing up, the tinned food; and he suddenly saw the functional atmosphere of the great aerodrome with its vast hangars, workshops and dormitory-buildings as a nightmare of a future mechanised world. 'I'm a little outside life,' he continues pathetically, 'as though in the hall of the Gare Saint-Lazare. . . . At heart, dear old friend, things are going very badly for me. Which is sad, because my physical condition makes everything as difficult as climbing the Himalayas, and this additional sacrifice is unjust. Little things become needless tortures. I am so weary of all these comings and goings in this big camp in the heat of the sun, and sometimes I just want to go and lean up against a tree and cry with rage. But even so,' he added in a heartfelt afterthought, 'I would much rather have this than the atrocious atmosphere of political controversy. I only wish for peace, even for eternal peace. I do so much want to like life a bit, but I don't like it at all.'

He felt not only the gulf of age (the oldest man in the camp, he informed Pélissier, was six months younger than he), but, worse still, the gulf of cultures. 'I suffer terribly from the absence of human contacts. All the same, all the same, the things of the spirit count. . . . I know how to melt, as it were, into group life, no matter of what kind or sort. . . . And no one suspects I want for anything, except, like them, for cinema shows and women . . . I have suppressed the greater part of myself.' And describing his two American room-mates: 'My two comrades have fallen asleep, and I shall have to go to bed too, I suppose, because my light may disturb them. (How I lack a corner to myself). These two comrades in their way are marvellous. . . . And yet I don't know why, as I look at them, I feel a kind of impotent pity. They are unaware of what troubles them, I can see that. Straight, noble, decent, loyal, but so terribly poor. They so need a God . . .'

It was at Oujda that he wrote the famous letter to General X. which was never posted, but which after his death was found

amongst his papers and has since been published in the *Figaro Littéraire* of the 10th April, 1948. This letter, so gloomy in tone, led to a theory that, at the time of his mysterious disappearance on flying operations, he was and knew himself to be a played-out man; a man who had failed to grow up, who had refused to accept the compromises and saddened wisdom of maturity, and who, once the phase of adolescent idealism was over, was consequently unable to face up to life, except with the aid of drink and drugs; and who may have committed suicide, either deliberately or in response to an unconscious death-wish.

It is indeed true that in this letter he declares he does not mind whether or not he is killed in the War, but, apart from that, there is no hint of a desire for death, let alone of any suicidal intention. But the letter does reveal a real pessimism, even despair, about the future of civilisation. 'I am sad for my generation, empty as it is of all human content . . . a generation which thinks of bars, Bugattis and calculating machines as forms of the spiritual life. . . . Ah, General, there is only one problem, one alone in all the world: to awake in man a sense of spiritual values, of his spiritual significance. Pour down on him something that resembles the sweetness of Gregorian chant! . . .' It is indeed a far cry from the Saint-Exupéry who once believed that the advent of the new mechanical age, and particularly the aeroplane, would lead to peace and understanding among men.

These doubts and anxieties about the world's future Saint-Exupéry shared, of course, with a whole generation of young men. Among them was his fellow-airman, Richard Hillary. Once a year in Paris a Society called the Association of Combatant Writers, its members composed of those who fought in the Resistance, meets to honour the memory of a writer who fell in the war; they have celebrated in successive years the memory of a Dane, Kajmunk; a Norwegian, Nordhal-

Grieg; and a Belgian, Auguste Marin. In 1950 they honoured the memory of Richard Hillary, and at the ceremony the British Ambassador, Sir Oliver Harvey, made some revealing remarks about Hillary and Saint-Exupéry and the spirit in which they fought and died:

'As your President has said, our Richard Hillary reminds us of your Saint-Exupéry. Both were aviators, both were writers. Both lost their lives in the sky, fighting against the same enemy. It is true that between them there are obvious and deep differences, for Saint-Exupéry was an older man who had a much longer experience of flying and of life, he was the author of a number of wonderful books and master of a precise and considered style; while Richard Hillary, killed at the age of twenty-two, left only this one book, in which it is evident that a sincerity of despair, and an uncompromising search into the deep meaning of things, fought hard to find expression.

'And yet there is a profound similarity between these two men, a similarity derived precisely from this particular quality of sincerity and enquiry. These were men of an extreme sensibility—possessing in fact the sensibility of the artist—forced, nevertheless, by an interior power to choose action; yet two men of action incapable of finding a happy oblivion in action alone, because they were tormented by a sense of responsibility and the need to try to understand. This makes of young Richard Hillary, as of Saint-Exupéry, a symbol of the youth of our time in our two countries and beyond their frontiers.

'I do not think there is any more moving spectacle in the whole of history than that of the courage filled with doubt of our age—the spectacle of the young people of our two profoundly civilised countries, who have never hesitated to look their doubts in the face and go into action. That is why *The Last Enemy*, like Saint-Exupéry's *Flight to Arras*, is a book which will always be read . . .'

There are, of course, other interesting parallels between the two men: for instance, their yearning to return to active flying,

even when they must have known their services as operational pilots would be more of a liability than an asset. 'It needed some persuasion, even some deceiving, to pass him as fit for flying,' writes Mr. Lovat Dickson,¹ referring to Hillary's return to the R.A.F. in 1942; and shortly after he, with his observer, was killed on a training flight. Saint-Exupéry's determination to push his way back into the thick of the struggle seems at first sight even more puzzling since he was not only a much older man, but one whose immense prestige and talents would surely have been better employed in a responsible administrative post. What, one wonders, made these two men volunteer again?

It is a difficult question to answer. There were probably several motives, some of them altruistic, others not; the strongest of them, perhaps, being what Saint-Exupéry called 'the need of participation'—an urge, amounting at times to an irresistible compulsion, to be at one with humankind by sharing its burdens and sacrifices. Saint-Exupéry had returned to the battle, he said, 'so as not to escape any of the cares and vexations of my generation'; and the pilot, returning from his dangerous mission over Arras, finds his reward 'simply in love—a web woven of strands in which we are fulfilled.' Saint-Exupéry also felt a responsibility, particularly towards his friends, such as Guillaumet, already killed in the War. 'We are of the same substance,' he wrote in *Flight to Arras*. 'Something of him died in me. Guillaumet became one of the companions of my silence.' Hillary, too, was obsessed by the memory of his fallen comrades, particularly Peter Pease, killed in the Battle of Britain: 'It was true that Peter was much in my thoughts, that I felt him somewhere near me, that he was in fact the touchstone of my sensibility. It was true that the mystical experience of his death was something outside my understanding, which had still to be assimilated . . .' And later: 'I stopped and looked up into the night. They were there somewhere, all of them around me;

¹ See his biography of Richard Hillary.

dead perhaps, but not gone. Through Peter they had spoken to me, not once but often . . .'¹ To him it seemed necessary to go back if only to keep faith with them and their shining example.

Both men also felt their decision was somehow bound up with their integrity as writers. Saint-Exupéry declared repeatedly that unless he played an active part in the war he could not write at all while Hillary wrote to Eric Kennington: 'Two immensely important days for me: thank you for them. Lawrence, I wonder, or you? T. E. to some extent certainly, for *The Mint* helped to clear up something that had been worrying me for months. To fly again, or not? I had got to the stage where I could rationalise no longer, but relied on instinct to tell me when the time came. The answer I can see now is simple. Does one wish to write for power—or success—call it what you will, or because one has something to give?'

A third motive was undoubtedly the desire for the comradeship of Service life which cast over them both the same irresistible spell. Returning to his unit in 1942 Hillary meets in the train 'a couple of youngsters, fresh from training school and eager to get on to the course. . . . It was largely to get back into communion with these that I made up my mind to return in the first place—but I felt outside, or rather not so much outside, but as though they were less fine than those I knew then.' And in *Flight to Arras* Saint-Exupéry declared: 'My spirit is nourished by this comradeship, a comradeship which seems to ignore its own existence, not out of humility, but because it is so utterly spontaneous.'

The thought, even the language, of both men is almost identical at times; they even experience the same disillusionments. Hillary writes: 'In the Mess . . . there is no chance of being alone, and yet I am alone all the time. This is the end of the world. . . . The whole atmosphere is the one I dread most—emptiness.' How reminiscent of passages in Saint-Exupéry's letters during this period. Even their pathetic complaints about

¹ *The Last Enemy*.

the hardness and squalor of living conditions in Mess and barrack-room strike the same dejected note. Probably, Hillary's disappointment, and perhaps Saint-Exupéry's too, arose from efforts to recapture the flavour of past experiences which they had now outgrown.

Yet they are sure, despite these moments of despondency, that they have done the right thing. 'One can go on arguing the thing out rationally *ad nauseam*,' Hillary told his mother. 'I can write, I am more useful on the ground, I only want to go back so that people may say "Well done!" and to get a medal, I am frightened of going back, I only want to make a name, and so forth and so on. . . . Finally, one must listen to one's instinct, and the time will come when I shall know that my instinct was right and my reason wrong.'

It is impossible not to respect feelings so sincerely expressed, and yet about Hillary's death there is a sense of pathos rather than tragedy, of discomfort and anti-climax rather than heroism. And this, certainly, was also true of the last year of Saint-Exupéry's life.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST YEAR

In early June, 1943, the Lightning squadron moved to Maison Blanche, the Algiers airfield, for a further period of training. In Algiers Saint-Exupéry was introduced to Mr. Robert Murphy, Roosevelt's special envoy in North Africa, and the day after their meeting he sent Murphy a long letter begging him to reorganise the entire Group 2-33 as an operational unit; both squadrons, he felt, should be equipped with Lightnings and go into action without delay under American command. He added that he was particularly anxious to see a revival of that *esprit-de-corps* which the Group had known in 1939-40.

The letter also referred to his own career as a pilot. He wanted to dispel the 'surprising legend, which is absolutely baseless, that high altitude flying will take its toll of the older pilots amongst us.' He did not hesitate to impress upon Murphy that he was a Franco-American celebrity, whose books had been awarded many literary prizes, but 'if I do not go into action I shall have to resume my silence.' And he added: 'I refused to join the Gaullists in the United States'—an astute remark calculated to please Giraud's foremost American supporter.

Dr. Pélissier, too, was doubtful whether his weakened constitution could bear the strain of high altitude operational flying. He had already warned him once that, even with the aid of oxygen, there was a danger for a man of his age in having to stand up to excessive 'G' which caused black-outs; tight turns at high speed, rapid changes in the rate of acceleration, sudden changes and differences in atmospheric pressure, were bound to be harmful. 'He remained deaf,' says Pélissier, 'but I knew him—and preferred to be silent.'

In mid-June he rejoined his squadron at La Marsa aerodrome outside Tunis, where he made friends with Jean Leleu, a recent recruit to the squadron. Leleu, a young man with a freshness and enthusiasm which must have been particularly nostalgic to Saint-Exupéry, described his arrival at La Marsa. 'I remember him so well,' said Leleu, 'striding across the airfield towards our tent. His large body was clad in a light American summer suit, and as he lowered his head to enter the tent I could not help noticing his eyes: there was such a light of life, of kindness, in them, which seemed to sum up the man himself. The cry soon went up—"Voilà Saint-Ex.!" and we started to cheer . . .'

On the 27th July Leleu saw him off on his first operational flight over France to photograph the Rhône Valley. 'These missions were trying,' Leleu said. 'We had to cross the Mediterranean, spend two hours or more over enemy-occupied France, and then get back to base; and we were flying all the time at about 30,000 feet. Normally, if we had developed engine trouble over the sea we could have come down in Sicily, Sardinia or Corsica. But these islands were still in enemy hands, and when we were tired out on the long flight home, we frequently ran into enemy fighters.'

Saint-Exupéry had taken off at midday, and six hours later he landed again at La Marsa. On the way back he had dropped down for a moment over his sister's house at Agay, which was later destroyed by the Germans. After this first mission his face, said Leleu, 'radiated a sense of peace and fulfilment.' Saint-Exupéry later described his experiences to a group of friends, among them the actor, Jean Gabin. 'You cannot imagine what it feels like to see one's country again after three years,' he told them. 'At that height everything seemed at first so dead and bare, as though there were not a living soul on the earth. "France is dead," I told myself, and I got sadder and sadder. Then, suddenly, little grey tufts of grey smoke curled themselves round my plane. They were firing at me! Now I was happy. France lived . . .'

'All the same, old chap,' Gabin commented drily, 'I'd prefer to be sad.'

The happiness did not last long. On the 1st August, only four days later, he took off again but decided to return because of engine trouble. Then, flustered, he forgot to pump up his brake-pressure before landing, was unable to pull up the aircraft as it touched down around 100 miles an hour, and crashed into a vineyard at the end of the runway. There was only minor damage, chiefly to a wing and propeller, but the accident had repercussions far beyond its importance. Saint-Exupéry had insisted on operational flying in spite of American misgivings and, as it happened, the accident coincided with a period of diplomatic friction between the French in Algiers and the American government. The American Command to which the French Squadron was attached, now decided that he was really too old for a combat pilot and the Lightning too valuable a plane to be entrusted to him. He was taken off operations and put on the reserve.

The decision flabbergasted him. In the French Air Force a minor accident due to carelessness usually meant standing drinks all round in the Mess, while in the R.A.F., particularly during training, it was often punished by a fine. But the Americans, in their zeal for efficiency, were ruthless. Hoping to make them change their minds, Saint-Exupéry asked all the influential American officers at La Marsa to a great banquet. It was a disastrous evening. Instead of growing more amiable as the party progressed, the American Colonel commanding the Wing drank heavily and became ill. 'And so,' as Leleu wrote, 'Saint-Exupéry had to leave us; he left with a heart heavy and forlorn, like a man going into banishment.'

It is difficult, perhaps, for anyone but an airman to realise all the implications of being grounded. Stripped of his wings, pinioned to earth, the airman feels a sense of loss and deprivation, almost like a symbolical shearing. For the air has become

a part of himself and his life; it is bound up with his freedom, his feeling of power, his ability to aspire towards the pinnacles and the heights; he misses, too, its lightness, its 'ethereal'¹ quality, which comes to be reflected in the character of airmen.

It was not therefore surprising that the next eight months, which he spent in Algiers, were to be the most miserable of Saint-Exupéry's whole life. Everything seemed to combine against him. He could no longer fly over France—his reward for all those years of homesickness in New York; he was out of things at a critical period of the war; and back in Algiers he was suddenly flung again into the atmosphere he hated most—the strife and quarrels of his fellow countrymen.

Swoops from euphoria to despondency had dogged him all his life; but this depression was to prove severer than any. Until April of the following year he stayed with Dr. Péliissier, who was made to bear the brunt of his frustration and despair, which were often projected into aggressive attacks on his friend. This made it difficult for Péliissier to help him for, as he observes, no doctor can be of use to his patient unless he can make a friend of him; and Saint-Exupéry persisted in regarding Péliissier as an adversary. Although busy with his medical duties, at any time of the day or night he would be interrupted by 'mon pauvre Antoine,' touchy and irritable, complaining that the doctor did not care about him or his health.

For in his distress he now took refuge in imaginary illnesses. At the beginning of November, 1943, after he had fallen down a staircase in the black-out, he became convinced that he had fractured a bone in his spine which had been badly set after the Guatemala crash. Péliissier examined him, but he refused to accept the diagnosis of 'lumbar contusion in an old rheumatic spot,' and insisted on the taking of a series of X-rays; and each

¹ As Richard Hillary wrote in a letter not long before his death: 'What is the particular quality of the Air Force? I find it hard to analyse. I suppose it is true that before the war, whereas the Army and the Navy had a separate mentality—the result of tradition—the Air Force had none. It still has none, I think, but it has something else which sets its members very distinctly apart from the other Services. To say that it is an ethereal quality is both whimsical and untrue, yet I can think of no better word.'

time he would bring back the plates to 'demonstrate' to Pélissier that there was indeed a fracture of the vertebræ. Another time he swallowed an overdose of various drugs. This led to drastic pains and disorders, which he chose to interpret as signs of incipient cancer; a second opinion and several X-rays were needed to convince him otherwise.

Bored, idle, overwrought, he would push long letters under Pélissier's door at night ('lettres-fleuves,' Pélissier calls them), accusing him of 'callousness'; he even called him, in one letter, 'an appalling Chinese executioner.' But these angry missives were sometimes followed by others full of contrition and remorse—'lettres-fleuries.'

Clearly he was in a highly neurotic state. Again and again he would miss appointments; he spent hours and hours on end day-dreaming, or performing experiments in the bath, which he had turned into a kind of miniature marine experimental basin to test out his new theories in hydrodynamics.

His turmoil of mind was worsened by the attitude towards him of the Gaullists, who were now about to become the official representatives of France. De Gaulle and Saint-Exupéry never in fact met, but the former was firmly convinced, from what he had heard of Saint-Exupéry's record in New York, that he was a 'bad Frenchman.' In a speech which de Gaulle made at the Forum of Algiers in 1943 on French thought and the Resistance, he mentioned a number of second-rate writers but never once the name of Saint-Exupéry.

This hostility now became highly inconvenient. In his desperation to escape from Algiers, Saint-Exupéry was asking to be sent on missions to America, England, Russia, even China; and each time the answer came back: 'Keep him on the reserve in Algiers.' How desirable now seemed the straightforward life of a pilot—the happy oblivion of action. 'I try to work, but work is difficult. This atrocious North Africa rots the heart. I am at the end of my tether. It is a tomb. How easy it was to fly on operations in a Lightning!'

There were lighter moments in the midst of the glooms when, says Pélissier, he had the gaiety of a schoolboy on holiday. A friend might discover him sitting on a curb in the street, surrounded by an admiring crowd of urchins watching him make paper helicopters; or he would roll oranges up and down the notes of the Bech piano in Pélissier's drawing-room; or tease his friends with strange conundrums: 'How is it, when you look at yourself in a mirror, your right and left appear reversed but not your head and feet?'; or introduce them to amusing and ingenious guessing and paper games of his own invention.¹

He particularly enjoyed playing chess with General Chassin or André Gide, who had now moved to Algiers from Tunis, and Gide found him a first-class player difficult to beat. He also carried on long mathematical researches with a professor from Algiers University, telephoning him each stage of his calculations, or suddenly rushing off to see him with a notebook of figures under his arm. 'Your friend is a mathematical genius,' the professor told General Chassin. 'You must try to get him to demonstrate to you the theories of Fermat, which no one had been able to do since the seventeenth century. He is capable of doing it.'

His conversation was still as flashing as ever, leaping from biology to astronomy, from sociology and Marxism to psychoanalysis and mysticism, from the music of Bach to the painting of Van Gogh.² But as with many brilliant talkers, it was apt to become a monologue; he disliked contradiction and needed silent

¹ There was much of the child in him. His sister Simone recalls that, when once he came unexpectedly to stay with her at Agay, string beans were served at lunch. Saint-Exupéry got up and left the table. When she went after him he was in tears, and exclaimed: 'You know I hate string beans. So it must mean that you don't love me any longer!' His sorrow was perfectly genuine.

² 'Contrast,' says Léon Werth, 'was always the very breath of life to him. At one moment he would be discussing genes, chromosomes and the Quantum Theory; at the next he would be drinking wine in a bistro and showing off one of his latest card tricks. These tricks he would treat with seriousness, whereas profound philosophical theories he would argue in that light, carefree, fanciful way in which he darted about the skies in his plane. He knew how to play with all the world—with children and animals, with dice and philosophic systems . . .'

and sympathetic listeners. Once, after a violent discussion with Pélissier about isotopes, a note of apology was pushed under the door, with a drawing of the Little Prince with arms outstretched, and coming from his mouth the words 'Forgive me.'

In the spring of 1943, when he first landed at Algiers, Saint-Exupéry had brought with him five thick manuscript notebooks representing his work to date on *Citadelle* (*The Wisdom of the Sands*, as the admirable English translation by Stuart Gilbert is called). Although he told Pélissier he intended to dedicate himself to re-writing it after the war, he seems to have had a premonition that he would never finish it; he referred to it jokingly as his 'posthumous work.'

Although he attached a great value to it he appears to have been nervous and uncertain of its effect on his readers. Once, when a friend arrived in Algiers whose opinion he respected, he forced him to sit down at once with the manuscript, while he himself walked nervously up and down the room, occasionally stopping to gaze over his friend's shoulder. It was a hot sirocco day and towards the hundredth page the friend suggested a visit to the sea. Horrified, Saint-Exupéry accused him of being bored with the book. The other replied that, on the contrary, he found it magnificent, but was tired from the journey and would feel fresher after a bath to read it again that evening. 'But you'll be sleepy this evening.' 'No, I won't,' protested the friend. Having persuaded him to read another few pages, Saint-Exupéry hurried out of the room, came back and pressed two Bensedrine tablets into his friend's mouth. After taking them he could not sleep for the next forty-eight hours and found himself reading and re-reading the manuscript. But a letter of encouragement sent later delighted Saint-Exupéry: 'Your letter gave me exactly what I needed. . . . You can't understand how important it was for me. . . . The only question which weighs on me is: what will the reader think of my book?'

A 'poem,' Saint-Exupéry called the work when he began it in 1939, and even now it is difficult to describe it, though it has obvious resemblances, both in form and content, to Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. He never planned it beforehand—'One does not plan a tree'—and the 'poem' was expanded to include meditations on themes as diverse and profound as God and religion, life and death, love and sex, good and evil, truth and error, sterility and creativeness.

It is perhaps unfair to judge a work which was never completed or revised but, as it stands, it is little more than a series of rambling, disconnected notes, and consequently produces, particularly when taken as a whole, an impression of verbosity and even incoherence. Interpretations have varied from that of the American magazine *Time*, which saw it as an expression of Nietzschean, almost Fascist ideas, to that of its translator, Stuart Gilbert, who considers it 'one of the most original, sincere and thought-provoking books of modern times.'

There might appear to be Fascist tendencies in the recurring insistence on the themes of 'discipline,' 'hierarchy' and 'constraint.' ('Freedom leads to equality, and equality to stagnation, which is death . . . the multitude is never free'; and again: 'He who questions is seeking, primarily, the abyss'). Moreover the very fact that Saint-Exupéry makes his spokesman an autocratic prince ruling over a remote desert kingdom of medieval social structure suggests a dangerous tendency to ignore the realities of the modern world.

On the other hand, one of the predominating ideas is the importance of creativeness, in life or in art. The worth-while people are those who 'exchange and barter themselves' in the creation of something, be it a work of art or a friendship; and as soon as they cease to do so their lives become meaningless. They are like the 'sedentaries,' those who receive but do not give, and consequently fail to *become* themselves.

This idea of bartering oneself for something greater than oneself, of losing one's life in order to find it, is really little

more than a re-statement of earlier themes; and, indeed, it can be traced back to *Courrier Sud*, where the pilot finds 'reality' and reaches beyond his own individual self and its desires, by dedicating himself to the 'métier.' Moreover, the Desert Prince, the benevolent despot, obviously owes much to the ideas and character of Didier Daurat—the man who first showed Saint-Exupéry that human beings can fulfil themselves and give meaning and purpose to their lives by consecration and discipline.

The 'citadel,' itself a creation, is the bastion where the creative spirit is nourished and kept alive through all eternity, under the authority of the prince or ruler—a conception not unlike that of the self-imposed Rule of the monastery, in which the Abbot as the immediate representative of God commands absolute loyalty from his monks, but allows them within this framework a freedom to grow and evolve in the spiritual life.

Although Saint-Exupéry in this last book appears to approach closer than ever before to a Christian outlook, his idea of God remains nebulous, a kind of Bergsonian 'élan vital,' or in his own words, 'the divine knot that holds things together.' There is no recognition of a transcendent Being whose influence is directly felt in human affairs, such as even in the God of Islam; in fact, the idea of God communicating with man is explicitly rejected, 'for,' says the Desert Prince, 'the whole greatness of prayer lies in the fact that no answer is vouchsafed to it . . . love begins only when no return may be expected.' In this passage, as well as in many others, Saint-Exupéry recalls the stoicism of Marcus Aurelius, though elsewhere he is specifically Christian, particularly when he insists that the value of life depends predominantly on sacrifice.

Despite all his sweeping generalisations on profound themes, which leave an impression of woolliness rather than depth or freshness of vision, the book shows his remarkable gift for stating abstract metaphysical truths in a language at once imaginative, rich and concrete. The pictures of life in the desert

are both vivid and varied. There are sandstorms and brothels, oases and palaces, forays and mirages; and there is always the vast citadel, 'with its secret inner garden where a fountain sings,' and where 'a man may draw nigh to something and retreat from something, a focal place of goings out and comings in; else, a man is nowhere. And there is no freedom in not-being.'

The parables and stories, the similes and symbols, recall the literature of the Old Testament, as incidentally does the archaic, rhythmical and slightly monotonous style. This, together with the wearisome insistence on discipline and authority, is regarded by some critics as evidence of lassitude in the author. These critics are probably right in regarding the book in some respects as the work of a tired, if not a disillusioned, man.

As the winter drew to a close, General Chassin, who was then commanding a squadron of medium bombers—Marauders—became alarmed about Saint-Exupéry's state of mind, and he decided to arrange for his friend to be attached to himself in some vague capacity—anything, in fact, to get him out of Algiers. Saint-Exupéry joined the squadron, based at Villacidro in Sardinia, in the early spring of 1944.

From time to time he flew as a wireless operator or bomb-aimer on missions to bomb bridges, railways and aerodromes—for, of course, he was not allowed to pilot. But although relieved to be out of Algiers, he loathed the idea of dropping bombs on places where there were human beings—'blind and anonymous killings,' as Leleu describes them. His reconnaissance missions had been quite a different matter, since the Lightnings carried no armament to ensure maximum power and speed.

Soon he was pestering Chassin to intervene personally with General Eakers, the American General commanding the Allied Air Forces in the Mediterranean, to allow him to go back to operational flying with his own Group. In mid-April Chassin took him to Naples to see Eakers, but although they stayed

there a week they were unable to arrange an interview. In spite of the delay, Saint-Exupéry, once again full of hope, was happier than he had been for months. By a coincidence the Group happened to be based at Naples, and Leleu, who saw him again, remembers him as 'carefree and gay, showing his profound joy by an overflowing vitality which both astonished and delighted those around him.' One day when Leleu visited him in his lodgings at Vomero above Naples, he found him on the balcony, and below were quantities of his little paper helicopters, gyrating and circling down into the courtyard, to the delight of the Neapolitan children. 'Saint-Ex. was as full of joy as the children,' remarks Leleu, 'and I discovered again the author of *The Little Prince*.'

The visit coincided with the great eruption of Vesuvius, and a black pall of lava, occasionally emitting red sparks, hung over the Bay from Torre del Greco to Pompeii, where both the new town and the ruins were a foot deep in ashes. One night Saint-Exupéry and Leleu dined high above Naples with Professor Noetzelin, an expert volcanist, who had come from Algiers to verify a theory about the connection between eruptions and radio-activity. During dinner Saint-Exupéry showed an unusual knowledge of molecular physics, and astounded everybody by predicting that an atomic bomb was bound soon to be made. He went on to discuss the philosophical implications of this greatly increased power in the hands of men; the ability to disintegrate matter, he thought, would alter alarmingly man's whole relationship to God and the universe. 'This discussion,' says Leleu, 'suddenly disclosed to me the extraordinary intensity of Saint-Exupéry's inner life and how he was always trying to relate facts and ideas to broad themes and concepts.'

Finally, Saint-Exupéry and Chassin tracked down Eakers in Algiers, where the American General, no longer surrounded by his staff, was more approachable. They worked on his sympathies and persuaded him to grant Saint-Exupéry, as a special gift and concession from Eakers himself, five more

missions with Group 2-33. Saint-Exupéry, overjoyed, joined the 1st Squadron of the Group at Alghero, in Sardinia, on the 16th of May.

Now, as he entered on the last phase, all the imaginary ills and other painful dilemmas of the last months were suddenly forgotten. Everything combined to make this last summer of his life a high noon of warmth and friendliness. Living conditions at Alghero were of a primitive elegaic simplicity. Instead of the queueing and the billy-cans, the functional hangars and the oppressive gregariousness, he shared with seven other airmen, who included one or two old friends, a peasant's cottage remotely situated on the rocky Sardinian coast. 'We eight pilots,' says Leleu, 'lived in brotherly intimacy, enjoying, between flights, a real holiday. Saint-Ex. joined in all our games with a youth's zest and enthusiasm, swimming, canoeing and, above all, fishing with dynamite—a sport which fascinated him.' In the evenings, sitting on Leleu's bed, there would be long arguments about Rilke and Kafka.

The squadron was then making flights over southern and central France, photographing ports, railway stations and air-fields in enemy hands. Again and again Saint-Exupéry would ask to be given extra missions for which, he said, he felt 'both a physical and moral need.' He loved these solitary expeditions four, five, or even six miles above the earth's surface; feeling houses and fields, woods and mountains, and eventually the whole earth, recede from him; being swallowed up, as he crossed the coast, in a thin blue haze in which sky and sea merged indistinguishably into one another; climbing higher and higher into a new world, dead, uninhabited, inert, where his only link with life was the whirring of the engines and the tug on his oxygen-mask with each breath.

'Once again I am experiencing the joys of high-altitude flights,' he wrote in the American magazine *Life*. 'They are like a diver's plunges into the depths of the sea: one enters

forbidden territory, decked out in barbarous equipment, encased in a framework of dials and instruments and gauges; and high above one's country one breathes oxygen manufactured in the United States. The air of New York in the skies of France—isn't it odd? At the controls of this light, fleet monster, this Lightning P.38, there is no feeling of movement, but, rather, of being fixed and immobile at one and the same moment, over a whole continent.

'The photographs one brings back are submitted to stereoscopic analysis, as organisms are examined under a microscope; the interpreters of these photographs work exactly like the bacteriologists. They seek on the vulnerable body of France traces of the virus which devours her. One can die from the effects of these enemy strongholds and depots and convoys which, under the lens, appear like tiny bacilli.

'And then those hours of poignant meditation as one flies over France—so near and yet so far. One feels separated from her as though by centuries. All one's tender memories and associations, indeed one's very *raison-d'être*, are to be found there, stretched out, as it were, 35,000 feet below, in the clear glint of the sun; and yet, more inaccessible than the treasures of the Pharaohs under the glass-cases of a museum.'

He asked specially to be given any missions in the Haute-Savoie because it was so full of recollections of his youth. One day flying at 27,000 feet over the lake of Annecy his oxygen gave out, and he had to dive steeply for air. A week or two later, on the 29th of June, his 44th birthday, he was also above Annecy when his port motor stalled and failed. He decided to dodge back on his remaining engine through the valleys of the Haute-Savoie, where it would be more difficult for the enemy to chart his course. But he took the wrong valley, found himself over Turin, and had to return across territory thick with enemy airfields. It was an extremely fortunate escape. On his return it was found he had forgotten

to turn off the automatic camera, and he brought back some extremely valuable information recorded at low altitude. He also reported that there had been an enemy fighter on his tail. But it had not worried him unduly. 'What with all the business of piloting, navigating, photographing and attending to the wireless I've already got enough on my hands without bothering about Germans!'

His comrades soon began seriously to worry about his safety, since he had already had more than his due share of adventures. 'I have known everything since I rejoined the Squadron,' he wrote to a friend after a mission, 'and my return today is a miracle. I have known engine stoppage, a fainting fit due to lack of oxygen, pursuits by fighters, even fire in the air ...'

On routine liaison flights, if not on operations, he often showed a terrifying absent mindedness amounting sometimes to sheer irresponsibility. Once in the operations-room, while waiting to set off for Tunis, he began reading a detective novel, went on reading it in the jeep carrying him to the plane, and again in the pilot's seat before taking off. When he reached Tunis a friend, waiting on the aerodrome to lunch with him, saw a Lightning circling round and round the field for at least ten minutes. It was Saint-Exupéry finishing off the last chapter.

On the 7th of July the squadron moved to a new base at Borgo, near Bastia in Corsica, and next day he flew on another mission over the Haute-Savoie. This made seven altogether, two more than had been allowed him by Eakers, apart from two others only partially carried out owing to mishaps to his plane. It was now decided that he should be let into the secret of the forthcoming Allied invasion on the south coast of France. This was the great news to which all the pilots were looking forward impatiently, but none of them, apart from Gavaille, the Squadron Commander, and Leleu, Operations Officer, had been told the exact date: the 15th of August. To share their know-

ledge with Saint-Exupéry would be a tactful way of grounding him. For no airman who knew the secret was allowed to fly over France in case he was shot down, captured and made to 'talk.'

The week of the 21st to the 27th July Saint-Exupéry had been spending in Algiers where, as godfather, he attended the baptism of Gavaille's child; and he had also seen Chassin again, and Dr. Péliissier who, as they parted for the last time, thought 'he looked sad, as though he were carrying all men's burdens on his broad shoulders.'

But when he got back to the Squadron he was in high spirits, speculating excitedly about the date of the landings, and begging to be detailed for yet another mission. They agreed to grant him just one more. Then they would ground him on his return.

It was perfect flying weather when he took off for Annecy and Grenoble on the morning of 31st of July; a typical Mediterranean mid-summer's day, swelteringly hot, with perfect visibility though without cloud cover in case of fighter attack. Gavaille and Leleu, as usual, helped him into the cockpit; then they watched his plane as it took off, climbed, and vanished over the Corsican mountains into the blue distances.

Twenty-five minutes later the radar post signalled that he was crossing the French coast, but by one o'clock in the afternoon he had not returned. They waited all afternoon in the operations-room, growing increasingly anxious, tense, silent; they buoyed themselves up with the hope that he might have landed in Switzerland, or perhaps come down in the French Alps where the maquis might have rescued him. But this hope proved vain.

To this day the manner of his death is uncertain. It is not known whether he had a fatal accident, or was shot down by enemy action, or even whether he came down over land or sea. No traces of him or his plane were ever found.

In 1948 his friend and publisher, Gaston Gallimard, received a letter which may shed some light on the matter. The letter came from a German pastor at Aix-la-Chapelle, Hermann Korth, who explained that he had been a Luftwaffe pilot during the earlier part of the war, but in 1944, at the time of Saint-Exupéry's death, had been seconded to Luftwaffe headquarters on Lake Garda. His job was to sift intelligence reports of air operations over an area stretching from Avignon to Belgrade.

Since the war he had read in a magazine an account of Saint-Exupéry's last flight, and on referring back to his war diaries had discovered that, on 31st July, 1944, a Focke-Wulf pilot on patrol over Ajaccio in Corsica reported the 'destruction of a reconnaissance machine which fell into sea in flames after combat.' This incident had occurred at about midday, when the Focke-Wulf was patrolling at between fifteen and sixteen thousand feet, at which height it is slightly faster than the Lightning. Korth's theory was that it had shot down Saint-Exupéry's plane as he was dropping off height before re-crossing the coast to return to base; the sun, too, would have been full in his face, and might have blinded him to the approach of the enemy plane. Korth's account ended: 'I am only a pariah, but I beg you to send my good wishes to the comrades of Saint-Exupéry's Squadron; they won't despise the greetings of a veteran German pilot writing from a Germany in despair, and who has French blood in his veins, for my mother, born in Lorraine, was a Frenchwoman . . .'

But how convincing, after all, is Korth's statement? There could have been no question of 'combat,' since Saint-Exupéry's plane was unarmed; and moreover, the day before, on 30th July, another Lightning pilot, an American by the name of Meredith, was shot down at roughly the same spot and hour, and there may well have been some confusion, particularly as no separate report of Meredith's death appears to exist on the German files. We shall probably never know the truth. 'He disappeared

without trace,' as Jean Leleu wrote, 'like a god of antique legend in a mysterious ascension.'

As Saint-Exupéry wished, his few belongings, including his manuscripts, were handed over to Dr. Pélissier. On 31st July, 1945, the first anniversary of his death, a Memorial Service, attended by his relations and friends, was held at Colmar in Alsace. His comrades of the French Air Force stood guard over the empty catafalque.

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